

EMBERS
AND OTHER
ONE-ACT PLAYS

GEORGE MIDDLETON





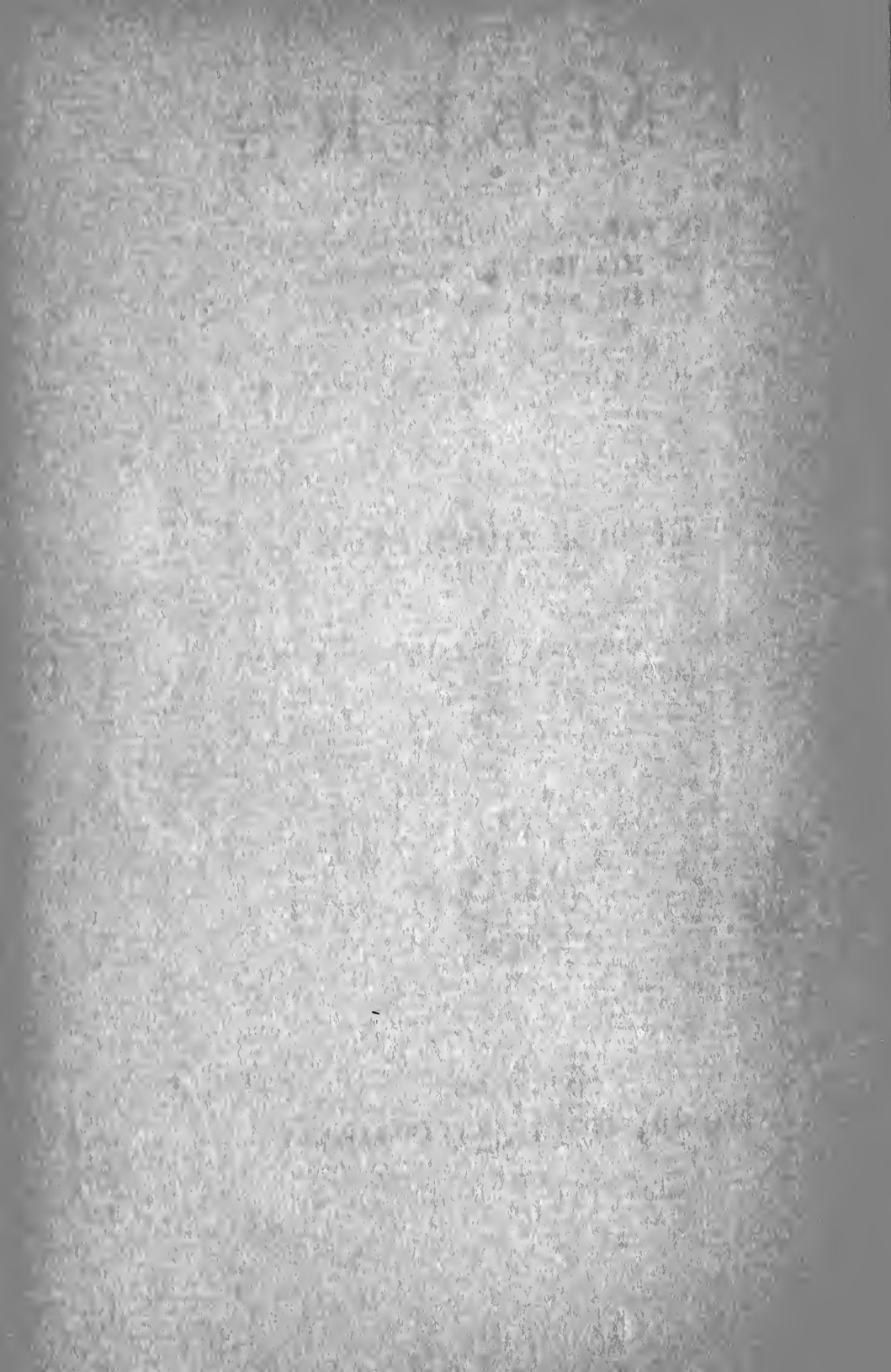
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EMBERS

WITH

THE FAILURES, THE GARGOYLE,
IN HIS HOUSE, MADONNA,
THE MAN MASTERFUL

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE

BY

GEORGE MIDDLETON

Who ever knows what is right? The answer always lies
so many years beyond.



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NEW YORK

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To
G. C. AND I. V. M.

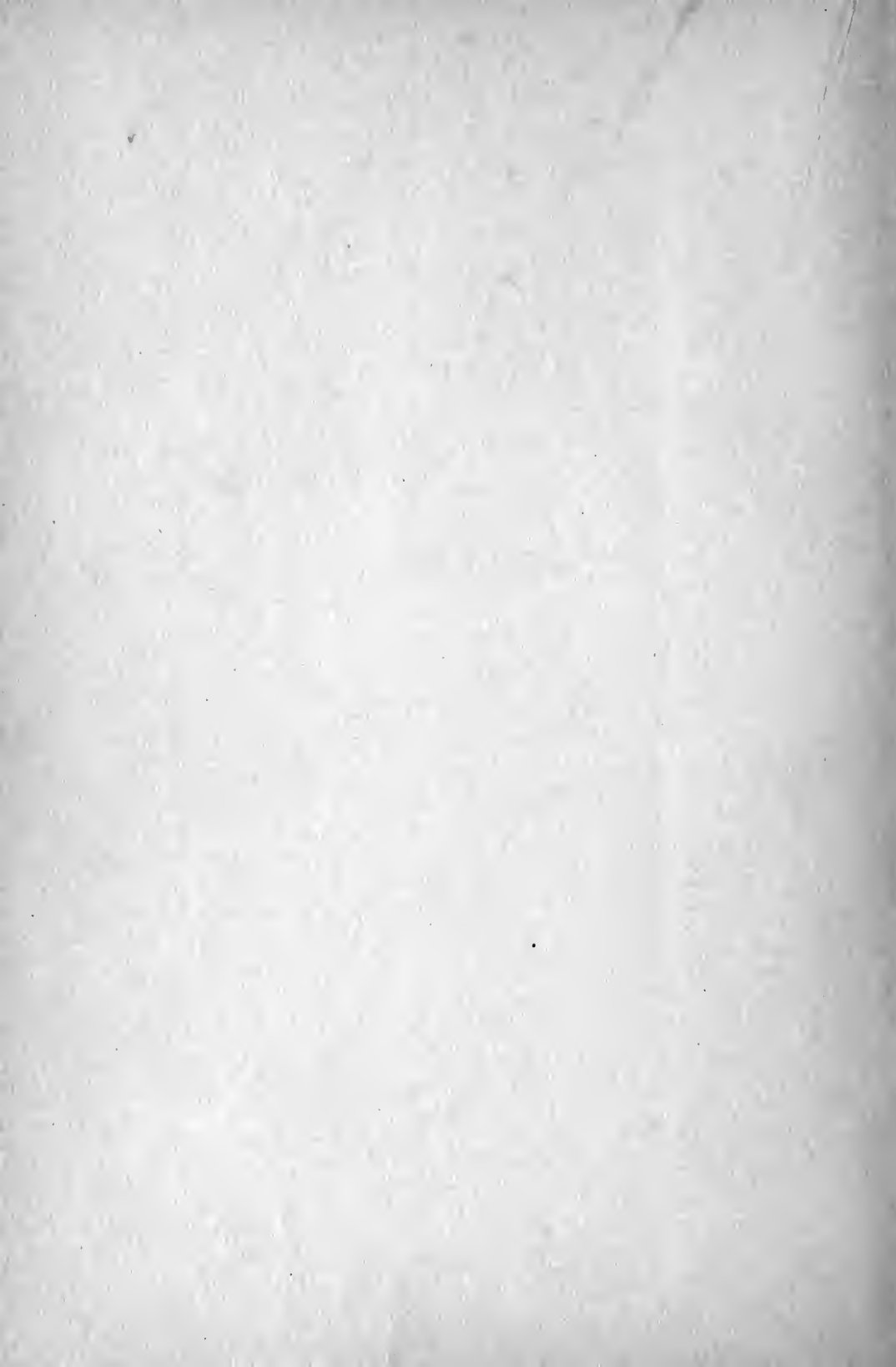
PREFACE

THESE little plays were written for acting, but arranged for reading. Knowing how small an opportunity the professional stage in this country gives for the serious one-act drama so common on the Continent, they are modestly offered to those who see some dignity in the form, and who realize that certain dramatic ideas find their best expression in the concentrated episode. The growing demand, also, among readers for plays has encouraged the author to write these, and their unexpected publication in the magazines has prompted him to bring them together.

They make no pretense save to show character in action, and, in several instances, to picture its different reactions from the same stimulus. They are studies in consequences and readjustments, being, in fact, a further expression of some preceding situation. Each play is, therefore, the epitome of a larger drama which is suggested in the background.

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EMBERS

THE PEOPLE

THE HON. MASON KING, *a Diplomat.*

RUTH HARRINGTON, *a widow.*

JASPER, *her son.*

MAID.

SCENE

MRS. HARRINGTON'S *Sitting Room.*

EMBERS*

THE curtain discloses the abode of quiet unimportance. Some plaster casts upon the old-fashioned mantel above the fireplace, at the right, and a few dark-framed engravings on the walls reveal the native refinement of the occupant. The furnishings are subdued in tone; dull curtains cozily drape the window at the left and the door near this which leads into another room. At the back, in the center, large doors open in from the hallway. Above the sofa, crept in from another period of life, is suspended a shaded lamp, which, when lighted, softly floods part of the room.

MRS. HARRINGTON is discovered sitting beside the sofa where her son JASPER is lying asleep. He is a young man full of latent strength, with a sincere and persuasive charm. MRS. HARRINGTON is in the late forties; her slightly grayed hair fringing a face sweetened and chastened by a life of obvious resignation. Her manner is calm and full of understanding, with its strange suggestion of unattained ideals. She is simply but tastefully dressed.

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There is a long pause. The daylight is fading from the gray winter sky. The clock strikes five slowly. JASPER turns in his sleep and laughs ironically, then sighs deeply. MRS. HARRINGTON rises, pulls his dressing-gown about him, lights the lamp, looking at JASPER, and shaking her head sympathetically. She shades the light from his pale, drawn face which shows pronounced traces of recent and persistent dissipation. She pulls down the window curtains, completely shutting out the daylight. The room is full of shades, shadows, and silences. A soft knock is heard.

MRS. HARRINGTON

Come in. Sh! (*The door in back opens, and THE MAID, in conventional black dress, enters with a letter.*) At last. (*Disappointed*) He has sent an answer!

(She takes the letter eagerly to lamp, sits, looks tenderly as though having seen the handwriting for the first time in a long while. THE MAID fixes the fire, and the dancing flames soon add a sense of comfort to the room. MRS. HARRINGTON opens letter, reads, sighs in relief at contents, looks at JASPER, and drops her head in silent recollection.)

MAID

Is Mr. Jasper—?

MRS. HARRINGTON

Oh, he's better. Only a headache. (MAID *starts to leave.*) I am expecting Mr. Mason King. Let me know at once.

(MAID *goes out, leaving door in back open.* MRS. HARRINGTON *rises, connects letter in her mind with her boy, and goes back to close door.* JASPER *tosses about, sits up, and, believing he is alone, speaks from a genuine grief, unheard by MRS. HARRINGTON.*)

JASPER

She's not worth it. To lead me on. And then toss me over for—. Damn her!—Oh! (*He puts hand on head, turns, and sees MRS. HARRINGTON, thinking she has just entered.*) Hello, mother. Just come in to see me? What time is it? My eyes feel—

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Tenderly and without reproach throughout*)

You've slept all afternoon. You were very tired. It's after five.

JASPER

I've an engagement at six. Some new friends.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Concealing her objection*)

Then you've hardly time to dress, dear.

JASPER

See here, mother—Well, well, don't wait up for me. I may be late again. Please don't. (*He sits down.* MRS. HARRINGTON *takes key from the mantel.*)

MRS. HARRINGTON

You left this in the door last night. (JASPER *pockets it, rather ashamed.* MRS. HARRINGTON *embraces him.*) My boy! my boy! (*He gently turns his lips from her attempted kiss.*)

JASPER

Don't, mother. I'm not worth—oh!—why are you so good to me? Why don't you tell me what I am? I know. I'm a cad. I've lost hold of myself completely.

MRS. HARRINGTON

We all do at times, Jasper.

JASPER

You never did.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Smiling sadly*)

I've made mistakes!

JASPER

I can't stop it. Something drives me on—on. Every time I think of—oh!—you don't know—; you wouldn't understand.

MRS. HARRINGTON

Perhaps not. But I see my son is not himself: his eyes are not so clear, his face is drawn, his hands cold. Besides, he has lost all his ambition, his—

JASPER

(*Uncomfortably*)

I must be getting ready.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Eying him tenderly*)

Yes,—yes,—dear. (MAID *re-enters with card which she gives to* MRS. HARRINGTON.) So soon? Take his things: don't keep him waiting. (MAID *exits, leaving door open.* JASPER *reads card as* MRS. HARRINGTON *hands it to him.*)

JASPER

Mason King? Haven't the papers been full of his pictures lately and—

MRS. HARRINGTON.

Yes. I'd like you to meet him.

JASPER

It's a great privilege, but I'm not keen for statesmen.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Reminiscently)

He was not so famous when I first knew him. He was about your age.

JASPER

(Absently referring to many dog-eared magazines about)

Do you still keep all his articles and speeches?

MRS. HARRINGTON

I have always been deeply interested; though it's been many years since—

JASPER

(Impulsively)

I don't want memories. I couldn't live if I looked back. *(Changing in mood as she gently watches him)* Oh! mother, I didn't mean to be disagreeable. *(Starting to leave)* I don't know when I'll be back to-night.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Tenderly while detaining him)

Jasper, you're troubled deeply—very deeply. I see that. I haven't asked a word. Boys can't tell their

mothers everything, just because they are mothers, can they? But you would feel better, dear, if you *could* talk over whatever it is with some one. (*Still detaining him*) Couldn't you go to Ethel?

JASPER

(*Laughs ironically*)

Ethel! Ha! Ha!

(*He slams door as he goes out.* MRS. HARRINGTON, *deeply moved, realizes the cause of his mood.*)

MRS. HARRINGTON

Oh, forgive me! So *that's* why! Poor boy: no wonder.

(*Pause. She turns.* MASON KING enters. *They stand alone a long while, looking at each other without shaking hands. The scene is quiet and suggestive of hidden emotion.*

MASON KING *is an imposing, authoritative man past fifty; his face tells of one deeply versed in the struggle with realities, yet possesses a kindness which colors all he says. There is a deep reverence in his attitude towards MRS. HARRINGTON which, at times, embarrasses his apparent social ease.*)

KING

It seems like yesterday.

MRS. HARRINGTON

Since you left me?

KING

With your answer.

MRS. HARRINGTON

You recall that first—after the absence?

KING

Your answer made the absence.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Cautiously*)

I am sure we can talk calmly now—without pain to you?

KING

There was no pain in my heart *then*—only emptiness.

MRS. HARRINGTON

Yet, after I married—

KING

My letter told how glad I was you had found happiness.

MRS. HARRINGTON

Happiness? (*She smiles vaguely.*) And you said *then*, as before, if ever I needed you—

KING

That is why I am here *now*.

MRS. HARRINGTON

Come closer. (*He comes within light, as she looks at him.*) Your jaw has squared a bit; that's because you determined to do things. Your eyes are steadier; that's how you did things.

KING

Do you see anything to tell *why* I've done things?

MRS. HARRINGTON

Yes. But I can't quite make it out. Some great resolve hidden from everybody. (*Less seriously*) You must tell *me* some day.

KING

(*Slightly surprised*)

You are still interested?

MRS. HARRINGTON

I have followed your career *upwards*. (*She falters under his intense gaze, then continues less seriously*)

Oh, the light also betrays the lines of an aging woman, eh? You can read little there: a marriage, a mother, a widow—and some dreams unrealized. *Voilà tout!*

KING

But a *mother!*

MRS. HARRINGTON

(With great joy)

Yes. *That!* *(Looks toward door.)* It is about my son. He mustn't know I sent for you. Won't you sit down? *(She sits: he looks about room.)* Does it seem like me?

KING

Yes. As I've sometimes thought you might be.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Pleased and surprised)

You've really thought of unimportant me? *(He bows. She looks about, too, with a touch of concealed bitterness.)* They are souvenirs of my married life. *(She motions him to sit. He does, watching her. Pause.)* Confess. You've been silently measuring me. Do you remember, with sufficient vividness, the original—now that you see the faded negative? She *was* a girl with hopes and dreams, wasn't she? And now, she's a woman with—

KING

Pleasant memories, I trust.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Starts to deny: hesitates)

But there's no occasion to be too serious—eh?
(More casually) You see, I'm talking just as we did
in the old days. It's strange: I've always felt, when
I thought of you—and it's been often—that somehow
you did understand me, that no matter what hap-
pened, I could still turn to—*(She shrugs her shoulders.)*
Much has happened, but I didn't bother you,
because—well—I've been away so long,—and—
(Tenderly) in the early years I was vain enough to
think perhaps it might open a wound. *(He bows.)*
But *now*—well, I turn to you to help me with my son.

KING

(Coming out of his reminiscent mood)

Forgive an unsociable guest. With gray hairs, I
fear I've grown to be rather a silent body. Of
course, I'll help the boy—if I can. What's the
trouble?

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Clearly)

The *remedy* lies in a long trip with a dominating
interest sufficient to gather his scattered energies into
one definite channel.

EMBERS

KING

(Smiling)

You've thought it out.

MRS. HARRINGTON

He's been very unhappy.

KING

Cynics would scent a woman.

MRS. HARRINGTON

I don't want to be disloyal to *him*.

KING

Has he told you anything? (*She shakes her head.*)
Then your intuitions alone have discovered—?

MRS. HARRINGTON

What and *who* it is? Yes.

KING

Is it roses or just wild oats?

MRS. HARRINGTON

(With conviction)

The best. They've been pals. It must have been
something else with Jasper. (KING *understands.*)

I imagine she's going to marry. I've known her myself for years. She would have been *worthy* of my boy.

KING

(*Sincerely*)

Then he's a lucky chap:—we must make him see it for himself.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Puzzled*)

You are enigmatical?

KING

(*Acknowledging it and smiling*)

And so, the disappointment has—?

MRS. HARRINGTON

Yes. He's been trying to forget in the only way most men think forgetfulness lies.

KING

Yes, yes. Most men.

MRS. HARRINGTON

It's hurt me, of course. I haven't reproached him because I blame *myself* for his weakness. (*He halts*

inquiringly.) Oh, never mind, why. I thought perhaps a little of *this* might—it does sometimes—that he might find himself unaided; but he hasn't. It's going deeper than I thought. He has given up all his work, and he was *so* ambitious. It's not a light young man's affair; it's— (*She sighs deeply*) and I was getting afraid of where it would end. I knew, every one knew, you were sailing, in a few days, on the Peace Commission. I thought—

KING

(*Understanding*)

I suppose your boy is fairly intelligent?

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Smiling*)

He is a college graduate.

KING

That's the sort I want. He'll be open to facts.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Eagerly*)

Then you will?

KING

(*Agreeing*)

If he—

MRS. HARRINGTON

You must *make* him go. (*Gratefully*) How shall I ever—? (*KING hushes her.*) You know, we older people are very careless sometimes with this love. A wrong word may separate us from the children we parents foolishly grow to feel we own—may wreck a life.

KING

Or make one. (*They look at each other.*)

MRS. HARRINGTON

Sh! He's coming.

KING

To think it should be *your* boy who—

MRS. HARRINGTON

There's something in his better self which reminds me of you, as I knew you. (*JASPER enters in Tuxedo. Overcoat on. He stops.*) This is Mr. King. My boy, Jasper.

JASPER

(*With great respect*)

It's an honor to meet you, sir. (*KING shakes hands, holds it fondly, indicates immediately he is pleased with JASPER. JASPER looks at mother: his eyes sink under*

KING's *close scrutiny*. *Pause*.) I am sorry I must be going out, sir. I have an—

KING

(*Cordially*)

Sorry, too. Should have liked a chat. (*Managing him subtly throughout*) Heard you were very clever.

JASPER

Who told you? Mother?

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Smiling*)

Mr. King knows all things.

KING

You're promising.

JASPER

You're mistaken there, sir.

KING

Why, it's written all over you. (*Looking him over*) Good clear eyes. (*They lower*) Steady-straight-at-you-eyes. (JASPER *faces him steadily*) Strong face. Right kind of lines coming. (*Feeling hands*) Plenty of good, healthy blood. Of course, you're promising. (*Eying him keenly as JASPER turns away*) Sorry, though, you've got to go out.

JASPER

(Almost in spite of himself)

I can stay a few minutes.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Delighted)

Let me take your coat, dear. *(She helps him off and looks at KING significantly. JASPER tries to appear at ease.)* Is it too late for tea?

JASPER

Tea—huh!

KING

(Seeing decanter)

Rather this, eh?

JASPER

(With a touch of abandon)

Yes.

MRS. HARRINGTON

Let me. *(She brings it down. KING pours out some; uses siphon, offers it to JASPER, who eyes mother and declines.)*

JASPER

Oh, I'm not thirsty yet.

EMBERS

MRS. HARRINGTON

Now you have met, isn't it too bad, Jasper, that Mr. King won't have time to really know you?

KING

Oh, strange things happen. I like your son. I want to know him. I shall.

JASPER

Thanks, Mr. King, but—

KING

I am leaving the country, you mean? True. (*Abruptly*) How would you like to go with me?

JASPER

(*Astonished*)

I don't understand, sir.

KING

It is a bit sudden, eh? The cares of statesmen these days are not public calamities but private secretaries. One of mine, for instance, has too persistently worshiped King Alcohol—(*JASPER starts*) and so he does not sail. It's personality I want; you've got that. I'll gamble on your ability. Will you take his place?

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Joyed*)

Jasper, it's what you've said would be the first step to—

JASPER

(*Eagerly*)

Do you think I could do it?

KING

I seldom make mistakes in people. Besides, it will be a great favor to me.

JASPER

Thanks. Thanks. I want to advance,—to be something—; (*Recalling*) at least, I *did*. But I can't do it. I can't now.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Persuasively*)

But, Jasper, one never knows what one can do till—

KING

I'm willing to take the chance.

JASPER

(*With conviction*)

That's what it would be: taking a chance. (*Poignantly*) No. I couldn't do it. I couldn't get my mind down to it. I'd always be thinking of something else.

EMBERS

KING

And then?

JASPER

(*With bitter conviction*)

Then I'd do like the Secretary you've dismissed!

(*He sinks into chair abashed. MRS. HARRINGTON controls herself and pats him. KING watches. There is a long pause.*)

MRS. HARRINGTON

Dear, dear, I'm sure you wouldn't. (*Defending him to KING*) Jasper has had a hard winter. And I've not been very well, until now, and he's been taking care of me, haven't you, boy? He's just a bit unstrung and excitable. The trip across will do you good, dear, and once you get interested, it will be easier. (*JASPER laughs softly.*)

KING

Work's the answer. Your mother was (*Correcting slip*) is right.

JASPER

(*Rises slowly, deeply offended, and controlling anger*)

Was? That's it. Why you've come. Mother wrote you. You've talked it over. So it was all arranged to get me away to save me from going to the devil!!

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Hurt*)

Jasper!

JASPER

You've been trying to "handle" me. Isn't that it? Mother?

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Resigned*)

It was for your sake, my boy.

JASPER

(*With quiet, yet sincere, indignation*)

You've made a mistake. I know what I'm doing. I could stop it. I don't want to. I'm "happier" this way. (*He starts to pick up his coat.*)

MRS. HARRINGTON

My boy!

JASPER

(*With quiet dignity*)

I don't need outside help, mother. I won't have interference from *strangers*.

MRS. HARRINGTON

You mustn't say such things.

KING

(*Taking JASPER firmly between shoulders*)

Jasper! You're no stranger to me. I know you better than you think. I have followed you for years—no matter how nor why. (JASPER *surprised*. MRS. HARRINGTON *turns and crosses in growing wonder and realization*.) I understand. You are feeling just as I did some twenty odd years ago. (*Movement by MRS. HARRINGTON*.) Like throwing all the best of you in the mud, with so many consoling companions. (*With great sincerity*) But you musn't. God, boy! you musn't!

JASPER

My mother has asked you—

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Quickly*)

Not to blame you; only to help you help yourself.

JASPER

She could have said these things.

KING

(*Detaining him*)

But you haven't quite considered *her*, have you? (JASPER'S *eyes sink guiltily*.) So you must keep away from the mud for your own sake. (JASPER *smiles*.) And for one other.

JASPER

(*Halted*)

Another? Who?

KING

(*Simply*)

For the sake of the girl you love!

JASPER

(*He stops in absolute astonishment that his secret is known. He turns to mother, but realizes that he has not told her*)

The girl I—who told? Nobody knew. (*Putting on front*) You're mistaken; there is nobody. Tell him, mother. (*She puts her hand on his shoulder. He sees she knows. He hesitates, and becomes genuinely and not peevishly ironical.*) Well! what if there is? (*Sarcastically to KING*) You know all things, ha, ha! (*With deep feeling*) What's she to me *now*? Do you know she led me on—tossed me over? I tell you, she's *nothing* to me. So why should I do anything for her sake when she doesn't care for me the way I want—not a bit—not a bit.

(*He sinks into the chair, overcome by his emotions. MRS. HARRINGTON suffers with him but tries to console. Pause.*)

KING

What has *that* got to do with it, Jasper? (JASPER laughs.) You love her, don't you? (*Silence.*) Has

she changed any? Is she any different now, any the less worthy herself, just because she didn't happen to care for *you*? Was it her fault she didn't? Can one help those things? (*Pause.*) Did she really "lead you on"? (*Quickly*) Now be fair to her! Didn't you just mistake her frank open companionship, her sympathy, her interest? You are not the first. (MRS. HARRINGTON *understands.*)

JASPER

(*Quietly*)

You're laughing at me.

MRS. HARRINGTON

No—no.

JASPER

(*Seriously*)

You think I'll get over it soon!

MRS. HARRINGTON

He has always cared.

KING

It matters little how it is to be: it's real now, eh? Very real, and I can't laugh with others at an honest love—if the girl is worth while. (*Measuring effect*) But I don't think *this* girl is worth while—not from your actions.

JASPER

(Rising ominously)

What do you mean?

KING

(With intention)

You make me believe it's only your vanity that's hurt. That she's some frivolous, flirting coquette—

JASPER

(Firmly, as KING has desired)

Mother, he can't insult— *(Turning, firmly)*
Please don't say anything against her, Mr. King.

KING

(Bluntly)

Have I said anything worse than you have been doing against her? *(JASPER halts. After a pause KING continues with great tenderness and persuasion. MRS. HARRINGTON held.)* Listen, Jasper, haven't you been trying to forget when it might be more worthy to remember her? You've been denying her worth to yourself when you should be glorying that you've seen it, eh? You've been trying to make the best of her a derision, haven't you? When to you it should be an inspiration and an aspiration. Now, shouldn't it? Think. Haven't you begun to smirch

her white gown a little—dragging it with you through the soiled hours,—when you should be keeping it your emblem of purity and goodness. Can't you see you've begun to wallow in the mud instead of bending your knees and thanking God a worth-while woman has come into your life! (*Pause.*) And you say I'm insulting her. What have *you* begun to do? What have you been doing?

(JASPER *turns, realizes, and looks before him, silent.* MRS. HARRINGTON *gazes long at KING.* *They stand on either side of JASPER.* KING *continues more lightly.*)

Come, come—you're not a wreck, are you? But don't you see a preachy old man of the world is trying to help you work this out to your own profit? Can't you understand if you've found a woman who is worth your love, you are richer? You may not be able to be faithful to your ideal through the hot years of youth, but it is at least something to be working towards. And, Jasper, if some men keep decent it is because they wish to be what the best women think them.

JASPER

And where is the reward?

KING

If one seeks rewards they only lie within one's self.

JASPER

(Not convinced)

That's one of those life-theories that sound well but can't be lived.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Hurt)

Jasper!

KING

(Smiling)

That's right; you're in the mood to doubt as I am to convince. *(Pause.)* Jasper, what I have told you has not been a theory. *(Sincerely)* It's been a—a practice!

(JASPER bows. MRS. HARRINGTON glances quickly at KING, and throughout the following shows clearly her growing realization of how much she has meant to him during the years.)

MRS. HARRINGTON

You musn't—

KING

(Simply and slowly)

It's not too tragic to tell you now. It's been the most beautiful thing in life. I was about your age

when I knew her first. She became all that the woman you care for is to you. She didn't love me either. (*Finally without bitterness*) That was all. But she'd always been fair to me throughout. You see our stories are alike somewhat, eh? With me, there was no one before and no one since. (MRS. HARRINGTON *conceals her tears.*) She was no mere illusion, either. (*With great conviction*) No: she was what men call an ideal. I measured all by her. Others came. Oh! the flesh was not always true, perhaps because the world forgives the *humanity* in us men; but the best in me *was*: always reaching to what I knew she would ask of me, if she had cared. So all the empty years, the thought of her has been leading me on. I declined this easy offer and accepted that difficult task, because, when in doubt, I went to a few letters, a stolen, faded picture in a locket, and some crushed flowers—they kept her clearly before me; they told me somehow the right thing to do. I owe all to her. It's been hard at times, but I am grateful that I could even love her purely without hope. (*Half looking toward* MRS. HARRINGTON) *That* was the great resolve hidden from everybody: to be worthy of my own love for her!

JASPER

(*Murmuring reverently*)

Mr. King!

KING

It's not the way of the world, Jasper. Most people wince and forget. True. But I want you to know

this. You. To start right and to see it can be done if one loves enough and only once.

(Pause. JASPER very silent, his head bowed. KING looks at MRS. HARRINGTON, the longing of years there. She is spellbound. A curious new light breaks through her tear-stained eyes. She is bewildered, confused with her own emotions, hesitates, turns, crosses softly, and sits by the fire, hiding her face. A sob is heard. Pause and silence. MRS. HARRINGTON absently pokes the dying embers into a new blaze. The clock strikes the half hour. The door softly opens, and MAID stands there.)

MAID

Excuse me, Mr. Jasper, the 'phone.

JASPER

(Uninterested)

Who is it?

MAID

He said you'd know *who?* He's been waiting at—

JASPER

(Helplessly)

Mother—

MRS. HARRINGTON

Tell him Mr. Jasper will not come to-night.

EMBERS

JASPER

Nor to-morrow. (MAID bows and exits, closing door. JASPER rises.) Mr. King, there's one thing I'd like to ask you. Did *she* ever know?

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Quickly)

You musn't ask that, Jasper.

KING.

She learned too late.

JASPER

(With vigorous determination)

Mother, I'll write Ethel, and tell her now, that I—

MRS. HARRINGTON

(For KING)

Yes, do. A woman ought to know that she means something to a man. For then, perhaps in her own little life she would try to be more what he thinks her.

JASPER

I'll do it now. You'll wait here for me, Mr. King?

KING

(*Businesslike*)

You will sail with me?

JASPER

When do you leave?

KING

Wednesday. Ten. Campania.

JASPER

(*Turning*)

But, mother—?

MRS. HARRINGTON

I'll help you get ready, my boy.

JASPER

I shouldn't go, mother. We've been so much together, you and I,—

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Kisses him tenderly*)

I've had you longer than most mothers. I've always been waiting for this time of parting. I am ready.

EMBERS

JASPER

(Hesitating)

But oughtn't I—

MRS. HARRINGTON

(With deep feeling)

You should not be held by false obligations. You owe nothing to me. I have your love. What you will make of yourself, by yourself, will be my reward for the care. Go, my boy: I shall miss you: but I shall not regret. You have your life to live and make. No matter what happens, you will always have my faith, my understanding, and my love. (KING *has controlled himself with difficulty.*)

JASPER

Mr. King, it must have been hard for you to tell me about— Believe me, I appreciate it, and I'll try to be worthy of your confidence, mother's faith, and—the other one. (*Good-naturedly*) I don't know so very much about you, sir—but mother does. I'll get her to tell me. Besides, she's got hundreds of clippings and things about your career and speeches. I'll run through them with her. I never could see why she kept them.

(He exits, leaving door open. The two are alone, and step nearer each other, with suppressed emotion. They speak quietly so that JASPER will not hear through open door; thus, still keeping him in scene.)

MRS. HARRINGTON

What can I say?

KING

Nothing. You should never have known but for the boy.

MRS. HARRINGTON

He has brought us together—again.

KING

Just to say good-by? (*Silence.*) *Is it too late?*
(*She looks at him in doubt.*) I forgot: you never loved me!

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Half dreamingly*)

Seeing you again, hearing you speak this way, recalls something I believe I felt for some one, some dream—long ago. (*She is puzzled, looks into his eyes, and shakes her head kindly.*) But you've worshiped a false ideal of me all these years.

KING

I have seen you again—as a *mother*. I know.

MRS. HARRINGTON

You don't know. I have done the unpardonable in your eyes. I am not the woman you think me—

nor mother. (*With an effort*) I told you I couldn't reproach Jasper in all this, because I *knew* I was to blame for his weakness. Oh, I love him so; but I wasn't fair to him—to his character at the start—because—because my boy was born of a loveless marriage. (*Pause: Looking into his eyes.*) You never thought your ideal woman would—?

KING

No.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(*Helplessly*)

You see. (*Pause. She loses control of her surging emotion, and becomes unnaturally agitated.*) I don't understand myself to-night—here (*Hand on heart*)—but I'm wondering what feeling makes me call for you, *Mason*, to help him I love most!!

(*He starts, comes closer, as though suppressing a new hope.*)

KING

You've shown me we grow by the way we accept consequences. In some strange, different way than I thought, you have become even more perfect than I knew you were. Listen, *Ruth*.

(*He moves still closer. JASPER re-enters with a new energy. They look at one another. JASPER halts, and finishes tearing up a letter.*

MRS. HARRINGTON *makes a motion of fear and uncertainty that perhaps he may not be so strong as he had previously indicated.*)

JASPER

I didn't tell you how *she'd* written me—that she'd heard what I was doing—that she was hurt and sorry 'cause I hadn't been strong. Well, I've just been thinking I'm pretty much of a coward to be *writing*. I'm not writing: I'm going to see her, to tell her what I'm going to do. It won't be easy, but I shan't let her suffer on my account.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Joyed)

Jasper!

KING

Good. I'll give you a lift on the way.

JASPER

(Has crossed and thrown up the shade. Moonlight streams in)

Your cab is there! I'll be back soon, mother.
(He takes up coat, and exits, leaving door open.)

EMBERS

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Greatly joyed)

Now I am sure of him—as I have always been of you.

(He offers his hand in parting: she slowly takes it. They show in a quiet, subdued manner that it is the first time their hands have touched in years.)

KING

Good-by.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(Quietly)

For a time?

KING

(Significantly)

We'll put it that way.

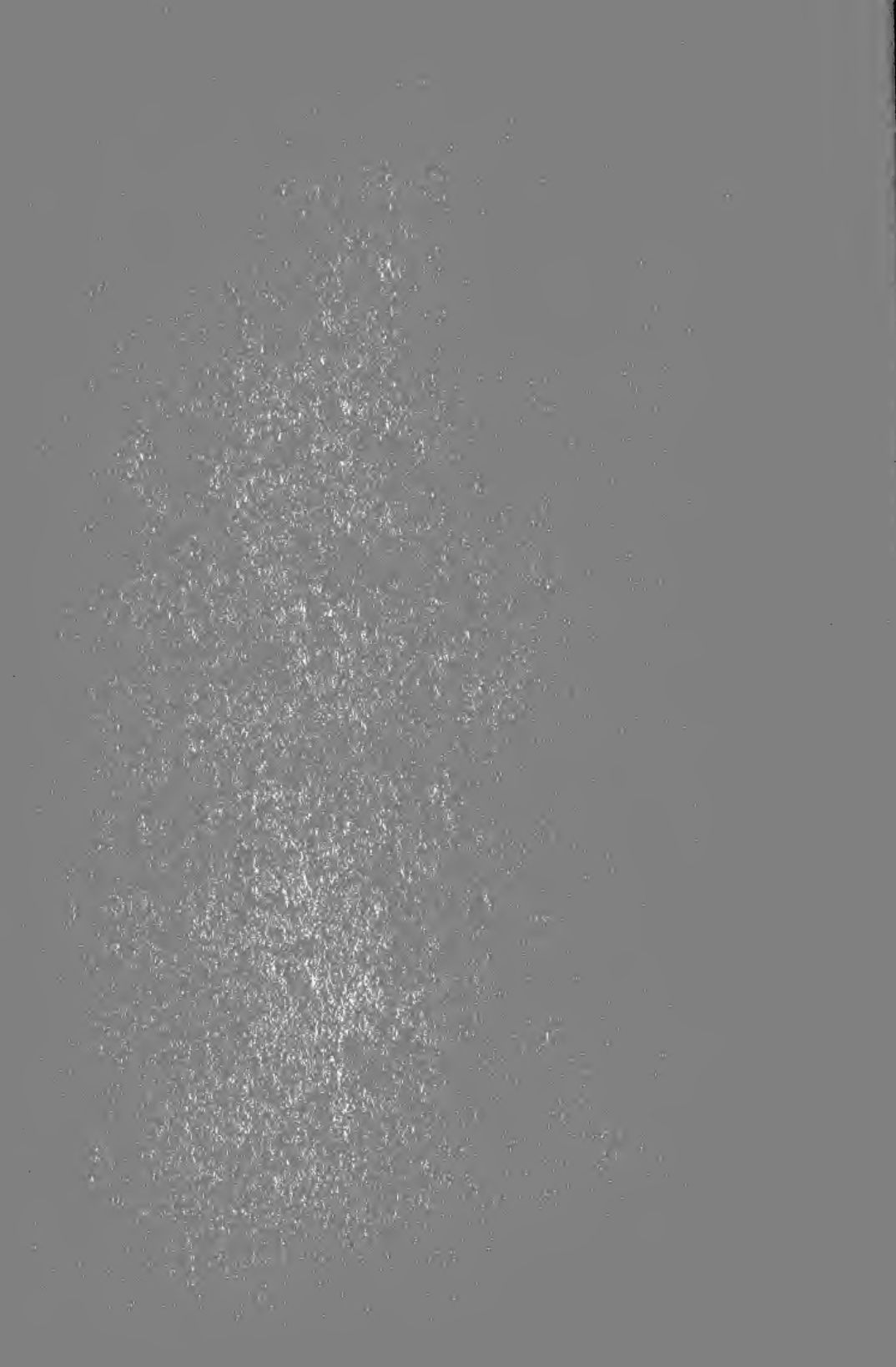
(They look into each other's eyes. Then he stiffens up; controlling himself, and exits, closing door between them. MRS. HARRINGTON leans back against it. The moonlight from the window floods the door and shows upon her face a look of mingled hope and joy, indefinitely touched with a sense of mystery.)

MRS. HARRINGTON

I wonder—if I— (*Her hand steals to her heart*)
—I wonder.

(*She stands there silent. The outer door
closes. Then she smiles.*)

VERY SLOW CURTAIN



THE FAILURES

THE PEOPLE

THE MAN, *an Artist.*

THE WOMAN.

SCENE

The parlatorio of a small apartment in Rome.

THE FAILURES*

A DOORWAY from the stairs without opens upon a simple little room. The lace-curtained windows on one side conceal a balcony from which, in the distance, the Via Bondinelli may be seen. Directly opposite these windows there is a fireplace above which rests an odd mirror with painted putti enfolding it. A door, hidden by a faded, beaded curtain, leading into the bedroom, is near this. A sofa-chair by the coal-Boulet fire; some smaller chairs and a table complete the furnishings. The room has not taken on a personal note: it seems detached from whatever could happen in it—just a place. The sun is burning through the windows, and, as the play proceeds, it glows into a dull red, finally fading while the fire alone tints the room more and more gently.

THE WOMAN is seated by the window, looking intently through the lace curtains. She is evidently awaiting somebody. She is about thirty, dark, with a suggestion of deep capabilities and little will. Her charm is more compelling than her actual beauty.

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Upon her face rests a vague suspense. She is in deep mourning.

There is a long pause: suddenly her face lights up; she rises, watches anxiously a moment, then relaxes—disappointed. In her hand she holds a crumpled telegram, which she smooths out and rereads. The clock slowly strikes five, and she crosses to it, indicating her expected visitor is late. She stands before the fire a second, kisses the telegram, puts it in her dress—recrosses to the window again slowly. In a few seconds her sharp intake of breath shows some one is coming. She watches, fascinated, yet strangely puzzled. She goes up to the door and leaves it open. Then she controls herself, comes down to the fire, turns and waits. After another pause THE MAN enters. He sees her: she gives a start, stopped apparently by his changed appearance. He slowly closes the door behind him, and stands there. They are alone and silent, and controlled.

THE MAN is tall, thin, eyes deep-set and yearning, with features once clear-cut, now blurred subtly. He is a man of halted potentials; he suggests a locked tragedy.

THE WOMAN

You are late.

THE MAN

(After a pause)

Yes.

THE WOMAN

(Slowly also)

You never were late.

THE MAN

Five years change.

THE WOMAN

Some of us. (*Looking at him*) It has you—
greatly.

THE MAN

Yes, greatly.

THE WOMAN

I have come a long way across the seas to *your* city.

THE MAN

(Simply)

I have never left it.

THE WOMAN

I knew you were waiting. (*His face shades a bit unnoticed.*) Do you understand why I am here—
now?

THE MAN

(Calmly)

Your husband is dead!

THE FAILURES

THE WOMAN

(Surprised)

You knew?

THE MAN

That could be the *only* reason.

THE WOMAN

It was a few months ago—at home. If he had been younger he might have—but he suffered little. I waited only as long as was necessary *afterwards*. I managed to get this same apartment. It hasn't changed so very much with the years, has it?

(They look about. He seems to linger on the objects: finally his eye rests upon the sofa-chair: she follows his gaze.)

THE MAN

Even that.

THE WOMAN

(Smiles fondly in recollection)

Yes: where you read to me so often those few months we were alone and happy. To me it seems like yesterday—

THE MAN

To you, yes. *(He half shrugs his shoulders and arouses himself from a settling mood.)* So you have sent for me at last.

THE WOMAN

(Happily)

As soon as I arrived.

THE MAN

(Sharply)

Why?

THE WOMAN

(With exhilaration)

Why?—Because now I am free.

THE MAN

(With measured effect)

But what has *that* to do with me?

THE WOMAN

(Simply)

I have come to marry you.

(They gaze at each other but do not move nearer.)

THE MAN

Haven't we both seen that marriage can keep apart those who love? Perhaps I have grown afraid of its power.

THE FAILURES

THE WOMAN

So have I. (*She shudders.*) Yes; it is terrible when love is dead. I must not think of those years: they were frightful. (*She comes closer.*) But, dear, it is different with us; you and I who have known love, who do.

THE MAN

It is too late with you and me—too late.

THE WOMAN

(*Scarcely realizing*)

Too late? (*Intuitively*) There is somebody else?

THE MAN

No. That problem was saved me: one doesn't suffer a second time willingly.

THE WOMAN

Then, then—oh, no: it can't be; you—you no longer love me?

THE MAN

Say rather I have learned really to know you during the absence, and that has made things different.

THE WOMAN

Different?

THE MAN

You are not what I thought you: you must pass—

THE WOMAN

(*Sinking in chair, dazed*)

After all that, I must pass! (*Losing control*)
Then *why* did you let me see you again? Why did
you come *here* in this room of ours? Why didn't you
write me? Anything else.

THE MAN

(*With cold incisiveness*)

Because I'm not the coward to dodge a difficult
situation. It concerns your life. You have a right
to demand and receive an explanation. I can't let
you be tortured, as I was, through inference and im-
agination. *I* want to be fair—if that is ever possible
between men and women.

THE WOMAN

It's not a time to be proud: I love you too much.
(*He is unmoved.*) To-day, I wanted only to feel:
now you make me think. It's hard when I expected—
but, you see, I'm—I'm calm. (*She soon masters her-
self completely.*) You say you have learned to know
me during the absence. How? Has one word passed
between us?

THE FAILURES

THE MAN

That was our agreement with *him*.

THE WOMAN

Yet you must have felt the messages I sent you every hour: you never left me for a moment. You knew me as no man ever knew me.

THE MAN

You knew love for the first time: you revealed yourself—that's all.

THE WOMAN

(*Leaning forward*)

And you *did* love that woman who was?

THE MAN

Yes,—to the dregs.

THE WOMAN

(*Eagerly*)

Then *how, how* have I changed? Tell me one single fact to show I am different than you thought me!

THE MAN

There is only one fact since you ask it: you stayed with *him*: you continued to wear his name and his ring but you loved another man.

THE WOMAN

So that was it. (*She puts her hands silently before her face.*)

THE MAN

You seem to forget the darkness that was closing in upon your married life before I came: the staring of your two naked egos, the seeing each a stranger, the boredom, the starved hours, the reach toward me to save you.

THE WOMAN

(*Interrupting*)

No, no, one never forgets. I knew my own lie, only he loved me in spite of all. What else could we have done, after we told him about ourselves?

THE MAN

You forget, too, I gave you the strength to stay with him the time he demanded to test our love by separation—before he would let you go “easily.”

THE WOMAN

Yes. You said: “We must not build our happiness upon a broken life.” And my crime was in being true to the strength you had given me.

THE MAN

(*Cynically*)

Not exactly.

THE FAILURES

THE WOMAN

What then?

THE MAN

(Hesitating)

Something happened to me.

THE WOMAN

It's no time to hesitate. Go on.

THE MAN

When you left *here* I knew I was loved for the first time. I had entered into my man's inheritance; nothing before had counted: through you I had touched the rim of life, and it seemed to whirl me over the seas and mountains. I had told you love would summon my forces with the brush to their fullest expresion, for in myself I desired the mere consciousness that you loved me to drive me on to all that you had expected of me.

THE WOMAN

(Who eagerly followed his words)

Yes, yes; you know I sought it, too.—Ah, how your words sweep me back! Dear, don't you know I could not have left you *then*, at all if I had not thought that?

THE MAN

(Cynically)

Couldn't you? I wonder. (*She is hurt by his doubt.*) But listen: I spiritualized everything to keep me strong in parting; I think I half believed it, too, till you had actually gone. And then—

THE WOMAN

Then?

THE MAN

Then I saw I couldn't exist on the heights alone: the air was too rare, and I had to come down into the valleys where the world sleeps and lives. I had misread myself. It wasn't only spirit: there was something more insistent than the hope of what might be in time: it was the sharp cry of the moment. (*He pauses.*) I loved you too—*humanly*.

THE WOMAN

(Unabashed)

I know. I know. (*Long pause.*) Go on.

THE MAN

And with the months there was that cry for you, for the sound of your voice, the touch of your fingers on my arm, the perfume which meant you—

THE FAILURES

THE WOMAN

(Moved)

I met you everywhere.

THE MAN

I tried to forget by thinking of your belief in my work. But, what were my pictures when my hand shook with the beat of my blood? *Then*, I ceased to see you as a force: it was only the *woman* who haunted me (*Bitterly*) and always—always like a sharp dagger thrust I would realize she was with *another* man!

THE WOMAN

(Quickly)

Whom I did not love, to whom I could give nothing.

THE MAN

But you were with him! That was the grinding edge. He could see you, touch you, be kind to you.

THE WOMAN

He saw only surfaces: all the rest had ceased before you came.

THE MAN

(Big)

But you were with him!

THE WOMAN

(Feebly)

Couldn't you remember I loved you?

THE MAN

I tried. If it had been only spirit I could have tucked it away tenderly in lavender and lace, and kept it apart from the humanity in and about me. But it wasn't: it was love I was not ashamed of—as it should be between man and woman—with the spirit there, high and strong, yet rooted below in the facts of life!

THE WOMAN

How I understand! How you must have suffered!
(Almost inaudibly) It was the same with me.

THE MAN

(Emphatically)

But, in spite of everything, I was faithful to what you wished, until—

THE WOMAN

(Breathlessly)

Until—

THE MAN

One thought cut away all my defenses: it was that which cheapened you in my eyes.

THE FAILURES

THE WOMAN

(Cut)

Cheapened? Oh—not *that*.

THE MAN

(Slowly)

Yes; and when you became less, love somehow seemed too *exacting* and (*Very bitterly*) there was nothing to keep me stronger than the men about me.

THE WOMAN

(Understanding)

I have tried never to think of those *others* who might— (*Turning aside and almost whispering*) But I knew you were a man. Oh, don't bring their shadows *here*.

THE MAN

(Hesitating)

I am making you suffer too much. I can't soften the facts. Shall I go on?

THE WOMAN

Yes: I am used to suffering. It is best you finish. (*She wipes her eyes.*) What—what was it I did to *cheapen* love?

THE MAN

As I said: you stayed with him.

THE WOMAN

(Almost fiercely)

Do you think *that* was easy?

THE MAN

(Strongly)

Perhaps it was *easier* than coming to me!

(She is stunned, quivers, and turns away silent. She almost staggers to a chair, and sits down with head bowed: he tries to control his bitterness, but it escapes more and more in spite of him.)

I waited for him to let you go willingly, to give you your promised chance for happiness. But as the allotted time passed by and nothing happened, my imagination pictured the possibilities of the situation. I knew how you could deceive, not always to protect yourself but to save others. Were you saving him—making it entirely tolerable? Were you concealing your deeper life completely, and tricking him with an affected happiness? Why did you go on as in the past? Was he holding you by Pity? If for his love *he* wouldn't do anything, why didn't you for yours?

THE FAILURES

THE WOMAN

(Confused)

Me? But—but, I couldn't hurt him!

THE MAN

I knew your capacity for suffering, and guessed you were suffering, but was that *all* love had grown to mean to you—an excuse *for* suffering? Were you, too, luxuriating, like so many other women, in your self-inflicted martyrdom and sacrifice, forgetting that I—the man you loved—was with you on the altar? Were you sheltering your inactivity beneath spiritual sophistries—jagged, rusty, death-bearing ideals of duty, pity, and the like—

THE WOMAN

(Trying to interrupt him throughout)

Stop—stop—!

THE MAN

—or were you willingly shirking the responsibilities and the obligations to the love you had inspired?—Don't you see how the *uncertainty* almost drove me mad?

THE WOMAN

(Primitively)

Then why didn't you come take me?—Why? Why?

THE MAN

Because it was your place to find the impulse from within yourself. (*She is confused.*) When you didn't, I saw you were a moral coward, a weak, conventional woman who hadn't the courage to reach out and take her happiness. (*With vehemence*) You stayed on in the house with a man you did not love. That's what destroyed everything in me—for I despised you.

THE WOMAN

(*Crushed*)

But, didn't you understand? Couldn't you somehow? Oh—!

THE MAN

(*With slow contempt*)

Yes, I understood: it was the line of least resistance.

THE WOMAN

(*Desperately defending herself*)

No! No!

THE MAN

(*Pressing the point*)

It was so much easier to be conventional,

THE FAILURES

THE WOMAN

I knew you were waiting for me. I knew—

THE MAN

But you forgot how tired one's arms could be, holding them out endlessly. (*Slowly*) You preferred to accept the conventional protection of his name, because you feared the parched places you must cross to come to me; you dreaded the peering eyes, the smirch of lips, the shrug of shoulders. So you mechanically kept by his side, starving him, starving yourself, and starving me. But now—now that his protection is gone—it is easy to come!—it is no effort; you need *my* protection. Death offers the gift, not you. But you are conventional to the end; for you even come to the man you love wearing the mourning weeds of him who stood between!—

(She grasps quickly at her dress, then with a deep moan sinks upon the sofa-chair amid stifled sobs. A very long pause follows. He stands looking at her, betraying only bitterness.)

THE WOMAN

(Completely broken)

Oh—what a miserable failure I am. How you make me see it. You've torn off everything. God!—and—and it's all true—true! I was a coward. I am.

THE MAN

(Nearer)

There may have been things I did not know.

THE WOMAN

(As though honest with herself for the first time)

They wouldn't alter. No: it's all true and more. never could be strong alone. With you I felt capable of anything, but away, alone—no—no. I couldn't face what would have to be gone through. I couldn't take that *first* step. The newspapers, the gossip—everything. I didn't dare move from his protection—for he did protect me—not (*With self-disgust*) not because he loved me—oh—that's the worst of it. That all ceased in him.

THE MAN

When he thought I had passed! How like us men!

THE WOMAN

Yes. He was conventional, too. He merely dreaded the talk—that—and nothing else. I knew it and despised him. But he was kind in his way. That's what we bartered these years: that was our marriage. I could not shake myself free from the wall that held me. Somebody has always taken care of me. That's why I married him when I was left alone as a girl. That's why I come to you. Don't

stop me. It's all true. I did fear the parched places and I knew in my heart that only when he had—could I ever come. (*She shudders and struggles with her sobs.*)

THE MAN

(*After eying her: a little more softly*)

Forgive me. If I had been stronger I would have spared you this—lied to you somehow, and made it easier. It seems like dynamiting a butterfly. But I've been thinking these phrases and they just came out. Love failed me and I failed love. I'm not strong any more. I was afraid in the old days you expected too much from me. Good-by.

(*He starts to go: she rises, halting him, at the strange tenderness in his voice.*)

THE WOMAN

Yes. I did expect too much from you. I was weak: I could suffer, yet could not *do* for love. But those years have gone: I can offer no defense save that through them all I did not know I was harming you. I thought you were strong and would go grandly on to your destiny! But I see you and your work needed me. That is harder for me than all you have said: not only do I fall beneath your ideal of me but the love I inspired in you failed to keep you "big."

THE MAN

(Humbly)

Yes.

THE WOMAN

(She comes closer to him)

You have blamed me with the selfishness that only lies in pent-up bitterness, and *you* have forgotten what you have done to me. Look at me. Straight in the eyes. *(He reluctantly does so; she continues reproachfully)* What have *you* done with all those dreams you said my coming had brought you? What have you done with all the ambitions which I aroused? Where are the pictures with the soul of the woman you loved in them? Oh! What have you done with your own love for me?

THE MAN

Nothing, nothing. That's the other reason why it's too late. You're worthy of pity: I am not even worthy of that. Now we both understand.

THE WOMAN

(Shaking her head sadly)

It is as though a great dream lay broken between us—

THE MAN

Yes, I feel it, too. Neither of us *did* anything!

THE FAILURES

THE WOMAN

(Slowly)

Two failures! Where love had so much to offer.
Two failures!

THE MAN

There are three. Your husband failed also. In his strength while he loved you, he might have made us both ashamed.

THE WOMAN

And ever afterward have stood between. (*The light outside is gone. Only the fire leaps and colors them. There is another long pause.*) How dark it has become.

THE MAN

I must be going out into the blackness again.

THE WOMAN

Yes. I also, later.

THE MAN

(Lingers)

Too bad—too bad. When love might have done so much. How we have abused it—we three. I suppose we learn to find our true value in loving. Oh!

The shame in finding so much alloy. Love is only for the strong; it breaks the others.

THE WOMAN

(*Quickly*)

No—you're wrong. Does love lie only in strength? (*She comes to him.*) Doesn't love ever come to the tired and weak? Can't one be just a plain, helpless woman craving protection of the man, who, in turn, needs a bosom for his tired head? Dear One, I have no pride left. I am that weak and lonely woman: you are that tired man. We have nobody else. Because you failed me, my love is no less. (*With penetration*) Are you so sure your love for me is dead?

THE MAN

I am dead inside.

THE WOMAN

(*Quickly*)

Are you? Are you? I'm not. I'm proud of the life that lies calling beneath the self-pity, beneath the woman's weakness and failure. (*Coming very close and holding his hands.*) Don't you know all these years, I, too, have held the dream of you close—close to me—and my call has been as strong as yours.

THE FAILURES

THE MAN

(Bitterly)

Then there was something—with him? (*She protests as he turns away.*) Of course not. There are some things a woman would always lie about to another man!

THE WOMAN

(Catching the jealous note in his voice, she eagerly puts her hand on his shoulder; turning him to her. He tries to speak but is swept to passion by the touch.)

Dearest, you still love me.

THE MAN

(Half struggling away)

No. I tell you—it's over—dead—tossed in the rubbish heap.

THE WOMAN

(Vibrantly)

This has always been between us: *this* has been alive all these years, and I'm not ashamed either.

THE MAN

No! No!

THE WOMAN

We can't escape: we've been blind to-day. Listen,
I love you, I love you, and you love me.

THE MAN

(Trying to free himself)

It's dead. No; no.

THE WOMAN

You do! You do! Your anger tells me so; your cruelty, the bitterness, and the hurt in your heart cries it. If I were meant to pass, you would not have come. Kiss me: you are afraid to kiss me—

(He stands, looking at her, caught by his own feelings. They are still a moment; then his head lowers. They kiss. She falls back, half swooning, in his arms.)

THE MAN

Dearest. Dearest. *(With tenderness)* Dearest!—

(He takes her to the sofa-chair, and puts her upon it. He holds her hands, and sits on the rug beside her. She opens her eyes.)

THE WOMAN

(Faintly)

Ah! The tenderness of you, *too*. You will protect me—watch over me. I know.

THE FAILURES

THE MAN

Yes, yes—for always *now*. I love you.—It's stronger.

(He lowers his head; she feels his tears and kisses on her hands. She leans over him.)

SLOW CURTAIN

THE GARGOYLE

A STUDY OF A TEMPERAMENT

THE PEOPLE

CRAIG ARLISS, *a novelist*

VAUGHAN BLAKESLEE, *a wanderer*

SCENE

A house in the suburbs.

THE GARGOYLE *

***T**HE summer moonlight flowing through a large French balcony window at the right discloses the dim outlines of a curious, clover-shaped studio. A door, which one learns opens upon a stairway, is faintly seen at the back. The light from a lamp upon a mantelpiece near a bedroom door, at the left, suggests more clearly the interesting collection of prints and curios placed along the wall. Some book-cases are noticed amid the strange mélange of tasteful if somewhat eccentric furniture. At a table near the window, ARLISS is seated writing persistently. His cigar has gone out, and as he pauses to relight it, one observes that he is tall, almost emaciated, and past the meridian of life. His dark, deep-set, inquiring eyes seem the only thing alive about his sallow, ascetic face. His thin, sensitive lips are bloodless through continual compression, and his high distinguished forehead is lined by a heavy shock of black hair. When he speaks it is obvious he phrases self-consciously. As he resumes writing, it is seen that his fingers are long and nervous, really conscious of the things they touch. He continues under apparent inspiration for some time; the clock striking four finally interrupts him. He looks up, realizing it is late. He glances*

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out of the window as though awaiting somebody, looks up at a stone gargoyle projecting outside, half grunts to himself, then searches among his papers and finds a telegram which he rereads for reassurance. The faint ring of a bell is heard. He starts up toward the door at the back, but hesitates and goes to the window instead.

ARLISS

(Calling out)

Vaughan! Vaughan! At last! Wait; I'll throw the key. An old habit, eh? *(He takes a key off the table and throws it from the window.)* There, right before you. You haven't forgotten the trick of that door? *(He takes the lamp from the table and goes up to the door at the back, opening it, and stepping outside on the stairs. He holds the lamp above him.)* Close it. Be careful of that turn. Seventh step. I'm always stumbling over it myself.

(A slight pause. ARLISS comes into the room as VAUGHAN BLAKESLEE enters. ARLISS lifts the lamp high, and the two men face each other in its light. Another pause.

VAUGHAN BLAKESLEE, still in his early thirties, of handsome if somewhat underlined features, gives indication, through a certain marked unkemptness, of the same native refinement of birth and sensibilities.

ARLISS calmly offers his hand. VAUGHAN does not take it.)

VAUGHAN

We are alone?

ARLISS

Quite.

VAUGHAN

(Still at the door)

The servants?

ARLISS

Are evils I am compelled to tolerate only in the daytime. (VAUGHAN *sighs in relief, and enters the room.* ARLISS *closes the door and comes down slowly to the telegram.*) You said it was something "important."

VAUGHAN

I came straight from the train.

ARLISS

Oh, don't apologize! I'm a night owl. I've been working. (*Referring to manuscript.*) Poor creatures! They're having a hard time . . . Oh, pardon, and your luggage?

VAUGHAN

I've brought none. I'm not going to stay.

THE GARGOYLE

ARLISS

(Enigmatically)

Then you haven't reached the bottom yet. *(Pause.)*
I never persuade.

VAUGHAN

I hardly think you will be able to, *this* time.

ARLISS

Your room has always been waiting for you these—
let me see—it's two years, isn't it?

VAUGHAN

In time, yes.

ARLISS

Whenever you are ready you can take up your
old life.

VAUGHAN

My old life, ha! ha! I'd have to be the same person I was, wouldn't I?

ARLISS

I accept the correction. Your new life dating from
to-day.

VAUGHAN

(Sarcastically)

Have you advice to give me about that, too?

ARLISS

Not precisely; but I might hazard a guess, though, that when you *are* ready you should accept Old Gambrill's offer.

VAUGHAN

(Surprised)

That is still open to me? Even after these last two years?

ARLISS

(Lighting a cigar)

Certainly. Old Gambrill understands, too.

VAUGHAN

Understands?

ARLISS

Yes.

VAUGHAN

(Grimly)

I wonder. *(He walks up and down.)*

ARLISS

Maturity is only mental vanity, eh? But this is a good chance for you, Vaughan. I'm not much on business affairs, yet I think your father would have approved. It's—I have it here; I only remember moods, never facts. (*He takes up a memorandum.*) Twenty-five hundred at the start—six months' travel—'rikshas, mules, and so forth—hard work, but full of color, I should think—stimulating, shoulder-rubbing—

VAUGHAN

(Crossing close to him)

Do you know where I've come from?

ARLISS

Yes. From the Devil. You went to shake his hand; he looked at your palm, smiled, shook his head, and regretfully sent you back to earth.

VAUGHAN

(Bitingly)

Something made me come to you.

ARLISS

(Covertly watching the younger man, measuring him, and purposely drawing him out)

I have been expecting you for many weeks.

VAUGHAN

I said nothing about coming in my letters. You received them all?

ARLISS

Every one of them. It was good of you to number them as I suggested. In spite of your bad handwriting, I followed you in great detail day by day.

VAUGHAN

Why didn't you answer them?

ARLISS

I sent my card and a check.

VAUGHAN

Do you know why I took your money?

ARLISS

The answer is obvious.

VAUGHAN

I took it because I despised you.

ARLISS

That's splendid psychology.

VAUGHAN

Oh, you can sneer at me now. But how could you—how could you keep sending it to me? How could you let me go on and on—

ARLISS

(Calmly)

What you were doing interested me. I was always glad to hear.

VAUGHAN

Glad?

ARLISS

Yes. Even after your letters came, so eagerly awaited, I sharpened my pleasure by placing them on the bookcase—there. All day they would cry out to me, but never till night did I release their tumbling words. Then, under the black mantle, I lived with you gloriously through it all. For to me your letters meant experience—sensation.

VAUGHAN

So *that* was why you did it?

ARLISS

Alone in my chair I felt the quick rush of your life. My lips bled with your wine, my ears burned with your music, and the rouge of your women rubbed my cheeks.

VAUGHAN

(Bitterly)

And *I* paid. *I* lived it. *I* suffered—while you sat comfortably alone in your chair. Ha! ha!

ARLISS

(Half to himself)

That was the only way I could do it.

VAUGHAN

So I earned the money you sent me. I was experiencing for you. I was burning the wick that you might see. I was material—copy. Oh, I might have guessed, for I heard you say once: "Creation sprang from suffering."

ARLISS

And you very rightly deduce it is generally somebody *else* who pays. We artists who justify ourselves forget that.

VAUGHAN

I've paid long enough. I didn't come to take up my life nor Gambrill's offer, but for a settlement with you—an accounting.

ARLISS

The money was not enough?

THE GARGOYLE

VAUGHAN

No. You must give me back something you have taken from me.

ARLISS

What?

VAUGHAN

(Earnestly)

My ideals.

ARLISS

(Startled)

Ideals? Brave images in the sand until a wave has kissed them.

VAUGHAN

My self-respect.

ARLISS

The vainest of all vanities.

VAUGHAN

My purity, my sense of honor, my dreams. You must give them back to me. I want my faith in things again. I want to be the old Vaughan. I'm empty now—empty. I have nothing left.

ARLISS

But disgust.

VAUGHAN

Yes, disgust.

ARLISS

(*Emphatically*)

And something else.

VAUGHAN

What else? Only pain—pain in my heart for every living thing that breathes.

ARLISS

That's it.

VAUGHAN

Yes; down in the depths I've wept for all the sins of the world, for I've been part of them all. I've felt the thrill of the thief and the hate of the beggar, for I, too, in my bitterness, have felt the impelling impulse, and when the impulse was born my judgment died. God! Don't you see I've lost my sense of right and wrong? I'm stripped—stripped! (*He sinks bitterly, burying his head in his arms.*)

ARLISS

Aren't your phrases a bit overseasoned? That's *my* literary prerogative, which they tell me, I always use. Come now, aren't you a trifle melodramatic?

VAUGHAN

(Rising with deliberate calm)

You shall take me seriously; you shall see I'm in earnest. I'm not a youth any longer, but a man with life washed out of him. *You* are responsible—do you hear?—for what I am. I was beginning to find myself, to argue myself out of it—beginning to kill my grief. The right word from you would have saved me—but you made me go out into the world, knowing the kind of life I would lead, encouraging me in it. And now I've come back for an accounting. (*He comes closer with great earnestness.*) Give me back what I've lost. Can you? Give it back, all of it, for I'm dead without it, and it is you alone who have killed me; and you must answer—first. (*He slowly draws a pistol from his pocket.*)

ARLISS

(Enthusiastically)

I have saved you—I have. Now you *have* reached the bottom. I'm sure of it. Don't you see, Vaughan, what I've kept for you, what I've given you, too; don't you see it?

VAUGHAN

(After a pause)

I suppose you think I will halt because I do not understand.

ARLISS

(With great earnestness)

If I do not make you understand, you must do to me as you intended to.

VAUGHAN

Must?

ARLISS

Yes; for if I had destroyed all in you I should demand it.

VAUGHAN

(Hesitating, then putting the pistol upon the table)

Well?

ARLISS

(Vigorously)

Where is your strength, your conviction? I shan't respect your intention if you are so easily turned from it. (VAUGHAN reaches for the pistol. ARLISS covers it.) It's not death I'm afraid of, but life. It would solve my problem and not help yours.

VAUGHAN

(Pointing sarcastically to the manuscript)

You talk like one of your characters.

THE GARGOYLE

ARLISS

(Smiling)

My characters are only my own different attitudes toward life. (VAUGHAN *drops the pistol on the table. There is a pause while ARLISS fingers it.*) This has flashed like the proverbial symbol between us. Give it to me of your own free will, and I shall know that you take up Gambrill's offer and start with your head high and your manhood sure.

VAUGHAN

(Savagely)

There is no use. I tell you I have no will left, only impulse.

ARLISS

(Quickly)

Then I'll meet your spasmodic melodrama halfway. I'll gamble with you for that pistol and all it means.

VAUGHAN

Gamble? Ha! ha! How? By "matching" miseries like pennies?

ARLISS

That just describes it.

VAUGHAN

Is this some scene from your new novel?

ARLISS

It's a bit too real and too unnatural.

VAUGHAN

A few moments cannot alter my intention. (*He sits down.*)

ARLISS

(*With force*)

You must resent every word I tell you; you must believe me in spite of yourself. Then only will you be convinced that what I did for you was right.

VAUGHAN

Then you do acknowledge it was deliberate? That with a *purpose* you sent me out to be what I was, to become what I am?

ARLISS

Yes, deliberate.

VAUGHAN

Why?

ARLISS

There was a *chance* that way. Otherwise, you might have become—

VAUGHAN

(Sarcastically)

—a famous novelist, a great success; “one of the mountain peaks,” they call you.

ARLISS

The mountain peaks are lonely.

VAUGHAN

As if loneliness were hard!

ARLISS

My sort of loneliness is.

VAUGHAN

Who’s melodramatic now?

ARLISS

Hear me out. Will you change places with me? I would take your life gladly, stripped and naked as you think it is, if you could take up mine, full as it seems to you.

VAUGHAN

I suppose I ought to ask you to—

ARLISS

—to show my side of the penny? Yes. Trite as it may seem, I was young once.

VAUGHAN

(Bitterly)

Like me; I know that beginning. Go on

ARLISS

And I soon made the astonishing discovery that the easiest way to avoid the petty worries of life was to deny their reality. Instead of absorbing them, I squeezed them out of my daily living. I—I—

VAUGHAN

But what has this to—

ARLISS

Wait. I didn't realize the tyranny of this comfortable habit until I faced the first conscious climax of my life. (*Stops in recollection: VAUGHAN becomes interested.*) Why drape the fact and bury it beneath pretty flowers? My heart was pounded by the tiny fists of a woman.

VAUGHAN

(With impulsive sympathy)

You, too? I never knew.

ARLISS

How beautifully your pity leaped toward me in spite of yourself! I like that. *You are real.*

VAUGHAN

I know what it is. Was it the same sort of thing as mine?

ARLISS

I loved her.

VAUGHAN

So your heart was broken too?

ARLISS

(With deep conviction)

No; if it only had been!

VAUGHAN

(Incredulously)

If it only had been?

ARLISS

Yes. But I wouldn't let it—I wouldn't. To kill the pain which was ready to flow into every fiber of my being, I shot my mind through it. It became something I had imagined, something I had read or written; for I simply and deliberately and cruelly denied its reality. It was born dead.

VAUGHAN

But that was strength.

ARLISS

That was cowardice.

VAUGHAN

Cowardice? How do you know?

ARLISS

By the punishment which lurked in the reaction. I found I had no longer the power to keep real any feeling I wanted to feel.

VAUGHAN

(Puzzled)

But you did not cease to feel?

ARLISS

No, only I felt differently. I felt through my mind. In other words, I felt self-consciously. It's a bit subtle; but, to describe it in other words, my emotional life became something apart from me, something I watched and guided—something which always knew I watched and guided. I never forgot how I *should* feel, only it was emotion parented by my mind and my sense of the situation—never directly, by the stimulus itself. I still had red blood that would leap to red lips, but there was thought in my kiss. I still had eyes that would weep, but no tear fell from its own weight of sadness.

THE GARGOYLE

VAUGHAN

(Thoughtfully)

That recalls—

ARLISS

I could not accept from the unsuspecting world either praise or blame for my actions, because *I* questioned the motives which prompted them. What days and nights they were as I sat alone beginning to doubt my own sincerity! There is no misery you have tasted greater than that. *Was I sincere?* I wormed my life with that question. I couldn't dodge *that*. And to myself I was soon forced to acknowledge I was a hypocrite—an actor whose grimaces made his emotion.

VAUGHAN

(Incredulously)

But couldn't you do anything?

ARLISS

I fought against it. How I tried to be as real to myself as I seemed to others! But in every action, every word, every look which sprang so self-consciously from me, I saw (*Pointing quickly to the shadow on the floor cast by the gargoyle outside*) I saw a gargoyle leer its relentless question: "Are you sincere?" Then I resolved to crush its thick lips, to escape forever from my own mind, for once to aban-

don myself to a life of the senses—a life without thought—to feel without question gloriously and nakedly, to become an elemental being who could react properly, without indirection, from every stimulus—who could touch and be burned—who could be cut and bleed—who could suffer pain—

VAUGHAN

(Eagerly)

Then, what did you do?

ARLISS

I threw myself into a woman's life. I stifled each cry of treason to the memory of the other love. I went on and on with words, gestures, tears, and sighs, furrowing over the same roads and highways seeking this new heart. But when her love paused and her calm eyes claimed mine in return, I found all I really had to give her was the same conscious lack of sincerity. I had not changed. It had been too late. I had become an emotional hypocrite with nothing real about the things I knew I said so prettily. And when I looked at her—horror-stricken, I saw I had burned her fires to ashes.

VAUGHAN

You ruined her life?

ARLISS

Absolutely.

THE GARGOYLE

VAUGHAN

How terrible!

ARLISS

How damnable! (*During the long pause which follows, the dawn gently tints the room. The clock strikes the hour of five.*) After that nothing remained for me but to become impersonal—to soil no other life with my thin fingers—to give nothing—to seek nothing—to get nothing—to be emotionally alone, detached.

VAUGHAN

(*Thoughtfully*)

That's what you meant by loneliness.

ARLISS

Yes. One reality was left: my imagination, my characters, my creations.

VAUGHAN

And other people's letters.

ARLISS

Yes. Your life in them was real to me because it was not mine. (*Softly*) So you see, when it comes to "matching miseries," as you call it, I—

VAUGHAN

(Almost tenderly)

I see you are not so happy as I thought.

ARLISS

(Looking at him cautiously and feeling his way)

But you understand why?

VAUGHAN

Yes.

ARLISS

Only the more intuitive than you would have grasped this without living it. You understand by an instinct; because it is an emotional echo.

VAUGHAN

(Half mysteriously)

Where before have I—

ARLISS

Back before the dawn of your new life—you yourself *felt* it.

VAUGHAN

(Recalling)

That's so—that's so. That's what kept me spell-bound listening; it seemed as though you were explaining to me my old self before—

THE GARGOYLE

ARLISS

Before I sent you out in the world.

VAUGHAN

(Excitedly)

No, no; you're baffling me with your subtleties. You're trying to confuse me; to make me forget *why* I've come. But I haven't forgotten. (*Pointing towards the pistol.*) You haven't convinced me I should alter my intention—for what has all this to do with *me*? I'm not that way now. Thank God, I'm not like you. But answer me—why did you send me out?

ARLISS

(Clearly and emphatically)

To save you from becoming what I am.

VAUGHAN

(Almost dazed with the idea)

Would I have become—?

ARLISS

Yes. I am the logical end of what in you was only a tendency.

VAUGHAN

But are you sure?

ARLISS

(Indignantly)

Only my sureness excuses my conduct. I had one chance to save myself—when my grief first struck me. I could have shaken myself free of myself then, and then only, in that molding moment. You were like me in all things. I saw you were killing your grief as I did, letting your awakening literary sense master and direct your emotions—dodging the pain of it all. I couldn't let you come to my end—to my civilized soul misery. So I took the risk to make you what you are now, and I sent you out to find yourself, as you have, in the mud and in the elemental.

VAUGHAN

But you've failed—I'm ruined, anyway.

ARLISS

No, no.

VAUGHAN

Yes, yes. You've saved me from one thing to toss me to another. You have no right to play with a human life. I can't forgive you. I must still claim my accounting. You've shown me your emptiness, but look at mine. You've shown me what you've saved me from, but what have you given me instead? What have you given me?

ARLISS

Everything I have not. Everything except my fame, which I have bought by losing all you have. (*He speaks with exaltation.*) This dawn is yours, but not mine; you have drowned your grief in its colors. The paths of day and night are yours, but not mine, for over them you have dragged your pain. You've soaked the world with your tears; the world has become yours. But nothing is mine. You are the humanity about you; you own its blood, its sweat, and its heartbeat. I own nothing. You've bought them for all time by feeling them properly, by feeling them sincerely. For that I'd give all my fame—just to be able to feel without self-consciousness—to feel as you, only because I felt.

VAUGHAN

(*Spiritually moved*)

Yes, yes; what you say must be true. I felt it out there, but it lay in my heart seeking a voice. Your words have let something free within. So that's what my grief has given me—the world!

ARLISS

I staked all that I might make you see.

VAUGHAN

I do now. (*Enthusiastically*) But in speaking like this, you've given the lie unto yourself. You've given me a release; it is my turn to give you yours.

ARLISS

You can't—you can't. Nobody can free me from myself.

VAUGHAN

I can. You've been living with a false idea of yourself. You're not what you think you are. You say you don't *feel*! Why, you, too, are thrilling still with the words you've given me. They are you, you, you!

ARLISS

(With grief)

No, I was only feeling in your place.

VAUGHAN

But you say you don't suffer. You are suffering now!

ARLISS

(Sinking into a chair)

I suffer only because I do not suffer *properly*.

VAUGHAN

(Looking at him awed)

What a tragedy!

ARLISS

No; only a penalty. All "actors" pay it, once they honestly understand themselves. And we all act so.

THE GARGOYLE

VAUGHAN

Actors! If you haven't changed from what you were, you must be acting *now*. (ARLISS *starts*.) Have you assumed these attitudes to save yourself from my intention? (*Aggressively*) Have you spoken because you felt it, or because you knew it was the thing to say?

ARLISS

(With deep pain)

But you *are* convinced that what I did for you—

VAUGHAN

No! I can't be unless I know you are sincere. (ARLISS *winces*. VAUGHAN *leans towards him across the table*.) Tell me, have you been sincere with me? Are you sincere now?

ARLISS

(Almost pitifully)

Won't you show me that *you* believe I am? Won't you please let *me* feel I am sincere—just for *once*?

(He looks at VAUGHAN, who, after a pause, with a look of pity, slowly pushes the pistol towards him. ARLISS smiles faintly, sunk deep in his chair.)

SLOW CURTAIN

3
2
7 5 3 7
3 5
7 2 0
2 3 2

PEOPLE

SENATOR VOLNEY PIERCE

CLAIRE, *his wife*

JUDITH SHANNON, *their friend*

SCENE

The Pierce Apartments, Washington, D. C.

IN HIS HOUSE*

A ROOM of a suite in an apartment hotel. Through the large windows at the right, which probably overlook a park, the brilliant sun pours, touching vividly the usual furniture resting in the usual way. The reflected gleam upon the telephone calls attention to the long table at the left upon which it rests, and a deep chair near it yawns invitingly. Another smaller table close to the window holds the magazines of the day and some flowers of the season. The couch, a few stray chairs and what-nots appropriately fill their mission. Two doorways, each half concealed through short hallways, lead off: one at the right in back, which apparently serves as entrance from the house elevators without; the other, down at the left, which obviously opens into the more intimate living quarters. At the back, at the left, the curtained alcove does not completely conceal the outlines of another room which proves to be the library. There is little which is either very personal or characteristic in the atmosphere, and the scene simply suggests, on closer inspection, the more or less temporary resting place of adequate means and position.

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The curtain rises with CLAIRE and VOLNEY seated as though there had been a long pause in their talking. CLAIRE PIERCE has just passed thirty; from the settled expression of her face, with its high forehead and firm mouth, one deduces great strength of determination, and in the steady, large blue eyes is discovered a latent spirituality. But one cannot brush aside the thin veil which seems to hang upon the outlines as though she has passed through some indelible experience. While she sits watching her husband a restlessness tinges her words and actions.

VOLNEY PIERCE would easily attract attention anywhere because of his sheer virility. The gaunt, deep-lined, middle-aged countenance, with its large, facile-lipped mouth and small, sunken black eyes, conveys the impression of deep living and thought. Yet there is, too, in his manner an instinctive appreciation for subtleties usually foreign to his type. His voice is resonant and contains notes of tenderness and emotion.

The long pause continues, and during it he has again picked up his newspaper and begun glancing casually through it.

VOLNEY

I'm afraid, Claire, there is nothing more to be said.

CLAIRE

In spite of my appeal, you feel you must do it?

VOLNEY

Yes; your reasons are sentimental, dear. I've thought it over carefully. It means my Senatorship another time—sure. (*Significantly*) You can never know how much I need the excitement of my career.

CLAIRE

For ten years your career has been my one thought. I don't want you to do anything dishonest now.

VOLNEY

It's politics, Claire. Addison controls the State legislature; he simply agrees to re-elect me for certain considerations. It's done every day.

CLAIRE

But never before by you. You mustn't do it.

VOLNEY

(*Rising, going to her, and patting her tenderly*)

There, there, Claire.

CLAIRE

You won't listen to me?

VOLNEY

I have, dear, patiently. When Addison 'phones me, let me know at once. I'm afraid I intend 'to consent

to his conditions. (*He goes out, leaving CLAIRE alone.*)

CLAIRE

It's not honest; but, perhaps, I don't understand.

(She rises and crosses to the window, slowly pulling the curtains aside and looking thoughtfully away. She sighs, not hearing the telephone until its ring is repeated. Then she goes and takes down the receiver.)

Is this Mr. Add—Oh, Miss Shannon—Miss Judith Shannon? Tell her to come right up.

(She replaces the receiver and goes to call VOLNEY, but, on second thought, hesitates and walks off in back. There is a sound of greeting without, then she and JUDITH SHANNON enter.

JUDITH SHANNON, past her first youth, too, with her auburn hair crowning an exceedingly mobile face and nervous black eyes, gives at first glance an impression of sex and temperament. But it is seen by her soft manner of speech and conduct that she has schooled and controlled her impulses beneath a cultivated mentality. She is a strong personality and immediately inspires confidence. One notices, however, that while she is evidently fond of CLAIRE, she is not quite at ease throughout.)

JUDITH

I'm so glad I found you.

CLAIRE

What a stranger for an old friend, Judith; it's nearly six months since—

JUDITH

I know; but horrid business difficulties with my publishers and—

CLAIRE

You'll stay with us now, of course?

JUDITH

No; I only ran over between trains. I'm sailing next Saturday.

CLAIRE

(Surprised)

Abroad? Another of your sudden impulses?

JUDITH

I simply can't write here; I need sunlight and the sea. I'm going to a little island in the Mediterranean to finish my novel.

CLAIRE

How wonderful! I wish I were going along. Volney'll be so surprised, too; we'll both miss you. I'll call him.

JUDITH

(Slightly agitated)

Is—Volney in?

CLAIRE

Yes.

JUDITH

I thought he'd be at the Senate—that we might be alone.

CLAIRE

No; he's waiting a 'phone call. He'll be so glad to see you.

JUDITH

(Stopping CLAIRE as she starts to the door)

Claire, don't call Volney—just yet. I—I didn't come over *only* to say good-by—

CLAIRE

(Her manner changing: her voice drops to a whisper; she does not conceal her excitement)

Judith, you have some word from—?

JUDITH

Yes.

CLAIRE

(Anxiously)

Has anything happened to him?

JUDITH

I have a letter for you.

CLAIRE

Give it to me. Wait.

(While JUDITH takes the letter from her bag she watches CLAIRE half with pity and criticism as she goes first to the door, left, and then to the library and back. After convincing herself that they can't be heard she comes down to JUDITH.)

Volney must have stepped into his own room.

JUDITH

(Taking another sealed envelope which is inclosed in the letter, and hesitating)

A friend who was with him sent it to me with the details. *He* must have given my address. It's not very good news, I'm afraid.

(CLAIRE is awed, and apprehensively takes the letter slowly from JUDITH'S reluctant fingers. She looks at JUDITH, seeming to divine the truth, then sits by table, and hastily tears the letter open. JUDITH silently watches her read what is apparently a short note. CLAIRE betrays nothing. She puts it down softly and bows her head. There is a long pause.)

JUDITH

(Softly, as she refers to the other letter in her hand)

His last words were of you, Claire. His lips were whispering your name when— They have buried him on the hillside overlooking the blue waters. They put violets— *(CLAIRE winces audibly, and JUDITH places her hand sympathetically on the bended shoulders.)* Perhaps, Claire, you'd better read this yourself—later. *(She places the letter upon the table near her.)*

CLAIRE

He blames me, Judith. He loved me to the end—yet blames me.

JUDITH

He must have suffered—and you here (*Glancing toward VOLNEY'S room*) in his house.

CLAIRE

Dead! Silence between us for seven years and then this—to blame me. And I loved him every moment. I loved him. (*She places her hands to her eyes; then she speaks in a strange voice.*) Judith, why don't the tears come? There are no tears; I can't even give him tears. He's dead! And they put violets—

(*She bows again with one long sob—trembling. JUDITH stands by embarrassed at her own constrained sympathy. Some moments pass in silence.*)

JUDITH

Perhaps I did wrong to tell you, since it cannot alter matters here.

CLAIRE

You did right; a last wish is sacred and—and it *will* make a difference here. (*Though she glances toward her husband's room significantly, JUDITH conceals her eager interest.*) Volney owes me something he can never repay. I've lived here with him and sent the other away. Yet all the man I love sends me from his deathbed is blame for living in my husband's house. Oh!

JUDITH

That is natural, Claire. It's hard—bitter hard.

CLAIRE

But I've suffered, too. He should have seen I was doing my duty. Was it easy to give up all he was to me in spite of myself? You knew at the time *why* I kept my husband ignorant. And besides, Judith, Volney loved me.

JUDITH

(Controlling herself with difficulty)

Yes, Volney loved you. But I'd—I'd better leave you alone. Is there anything *I* can do?

CLAIRE

He is dead, Judith. What can you do? *(Taking her hand affectionately)* You've been so good. You bring all things back each time I see you; for you alone knew what terrible days they were when—when it was being finished. I never would have staggered through them without Volney's discovering, if it hadn't been for *you*.

JUDITH

No, Claire, I did nothing.

CLAIRE

You protected each of us from the other. If you hadn't been with him so much working on the articles

together— Do you remember those articles?
(*Vaguely*) What were they about?

JUDITH

(*Struggling*)

I forget—I—

CLAIRE

Oh, Judith, each time when things became too hard later, you were always ready to help me. My strength has faltered so often but I kept on. Judith! Judith! Can I ever forget your goodness to me and to Volney?

JUDITH

(*Impulsively*)

Claire! Stop! Stop! I can't stand it. Let me go. *I'm* not a hypocrite; it isn't in my blood.

CLAIRE

Judith!

JUDITH

(*Almost fiercely*)

I can't take your thanks. I don't want you ever to speak of this to me again.

CLAIRE

Judith!

JUDITH

That's why I haven't been here lately, why I'm going far away for good. Your confidences have been a burning temptation to me. I can't bear them any more, do you hear? I can't live in this lie between you and Volney; it's crushing all that's decent in me. I can't.

CLAIRE

(In an intuitive flash)

Judith, you love my husband!

JUDITH

(Openly)

Yes.

CLAIRE

(Quickly)

Does Volney know?

JUDITH

Nothing. *(As CLAIRE turns away relieved.)* Though I knew you didn't love him as he thinks. I haven't been disloyal. *(Impulsively)* But I tell you, Claire, if he *had* loved me I wouldn't have been the coward—

CLAIRE

—that I was? You mean that?

JUDITH

You've wrecked a man's life.

CLAIRE

(Firmly)

I did my duty by Volney.

JUDITH

(Fiercely)

Did you?

CLAIRE

Yes. What he has become through me proves it. His career is mine; his integrity— *(She suddenly recalls the dishonest deed her husband is contemplating. The force of her words fails her, and she sinks into the chair, looking toward his room.)* I tell you, Judith, I did right; of course, I did right.

JUDITH

And the other man?

CLAIRE

Judith, this is terrible of you.

JUDITH

(Realizing her cruelty and going to CLAIRE more tenderly)

Little Claire, forgive me. I was a beast to add to your pain in this moment. Neither one of us is herself. Of course, Volney is your justification. He loves you; you need fear nothing from me. Forgive me. Only love means something different to me than you have made it. That's all. This is good-by. Oh, don't be sorry for me. But see that you *never* let him weaken for your own sake—if not his. *(The telephone rings.)*

CLAIRE

Addison! *(She stands horrified, realizing its significance; the long, impatient ring is repeated.)*

VOLNEY

(Outside)

Is that for me, Claire?

CLAIRE

(To herself as she slowly walks toward the telephone)

Addison!

VOLNEY

(As he enters)

See who it is! *(Sees JUDITH.)* Why, Judith, I didn't know—

JUDITH

(Self-defensively throughout as they shake hands)

I've only come to shake your hand. Claire will explain where I'm off to.

VOLNEY

Off?

CLAIRE

(Having taken down receiver)

It's for you, Volney.

VOLNEY

Tell them to hold the wire. *(CLAIRE does so, mechanically putting the receiver down on the table, yet scarcely watching them.)* You mustn't run away like this without—

JUDITH

I know it's horrid of me, but I didn't realize how long I was talking to Claire. Goodness! I am late for my train now. My cab's waiting. Good-by.

VOLNEY

I'll see you down.

JUDITH

No. One mustn't keep a Senator's 'phone and business of state waiting. I've said good-by to Claire. And now to you. Good luck, Volney, and happiness. (*She shakes hands again honestly, concealing everything, and goes out quickly.*)

VOLNEY

Why, how strange of her. I wonder why— (*He stands a second perplexed and then goes off back to close the door. CLAIRE is alone.*)

CLAIRE

"Never let him weaken." (*Suddenly a determined look leaps into her face; she takes up the receiver, not noting VOLNEY has re-entered, and hears.*) Is this Mr. Addison? Well, won't you ring up later? Senator Pierce is not here. He'll be back soon.

VOLNEY

(*Coming to her*)

Claire!

CLAIRE

(*Hangs up the receiver and faces him*)

Volney, you shan't make this deal. I can't let you at any cost—*now*.

VOLNEY

Must we go over this *again*?

CLAIRE

For the last time. I beg of you not to do this. Can't your love for me without question do as I ask?

VOLNEY

(Losing patience)

It's absurd to put it that way.

CLAIRE

(Preventing him as he reaches toward the telephone)

This touches something deep between ourselves, Volney. I can't let you cheapen my ideal of you; I can't let you do one single thing that's dishonest—*now*. I'd rather lose your love, rather topple over whatever happiness and joy you have found in me than let you do this. I'm desperate, Volney. Give this up.

VOLNEY

Claire, you're ridiculously capricious to-day. What's back of this wild mood? Why should this be so abnormally important to *you*? I have said it's only a risk.

CLAIRE

It's your willingness to take it.

VOLNEY

What's the hidden reason that touches something deep between ourselves? Why should I give this up?

CLAIRE

(Realizing what must inevitably follow)

Volney, for my *justification*.

VOLNEY

(Mystified)

Justification?

CLAIRE

Yes. You owe me a great debt, Volney. You never knew. You must repay me now by keeping yourself the man I thought you. By keeping your career and integrity clean. That can be my only justification for what I've done. Oh! *(Her hand accidentally touches the letter she has placed in her bosom; she breaks a bit.)* You must justify me—you must. I see that; and nothing else—otherwise—oh, the horror, the grimness, the irony!

(He stands looking at her as she is shuddering. Then he half turns her toward him, forcing her to look into his eyes.)

VOLNEY

What is it, Claire?

CLAIRE

(without flinching)

There's been another man in my life for seven years and I gave him up. *(They stand some moments; then VOLNEY, very quiet, slowly takes his hands from her shoulders, and sits upon the chair back of her. She still stands where she was without turning toward him.)* Help me. Help me, Volney.

VOLNEY

Go on.

CLAIRE

There isn't much. I knew him before—before you, and I—but I 'didn't realize till—till *afterwards* that the touch of his hand— Oh, I can't put it into words. But he loved me, *too*.

VOLNEY

Why didn't he come to me?

CLAIRE

He wanted to.

VOLNEY

You prevented?

CLAIRE

Yes.

VOLNEY

Then why didn't *you* tell me?

CLAIRE

I didn't want you to know. I sent him away almost as soon as we both realized. We haven't seen each other since.

VOLNEY

Why?

CLAIRE

(Turning toward him for the first time)

For your sake.

VOLNEY

For me?

CLAIRE

I couldn't allow any blow like that to halt the development of your character; it was struggling between expediences and ideals; it had just begun to crystallize so strong and firm and—

VOLNEY

(Incredulously)

My development!

CLAIRE

And besides, I couldn't let any scandal hurt your career.

VOLNEY

How could that—?

CLAIRE

You were a coming man; no matter how little you might be to blame, the voters would never have supported you. You wouldn't divorce me; you were too—too decent, and there was no cause save just I loved him. And I couldn't get the divorce by paltry connivance, for you never would have been able to explain to the public that it was for my happiness. So I—I sent him away—that, in the stress of public life, your character might grow even stronger with the woman you loved standing by and that you might not be smirched with a family scandal. Your career, your honor, your integrity have been everything to me. That's why you musn't do this thing. For God, don't you see? If you fall or falter or weaken, all I have done will be terrible; for I've just learned that—that he couldn't forget me, that his life has been wrecked, and that he hasn't been strong enough to stand what I asked of him. And it's mainly my fault. Volney, Volney, you owe me something, for I gave up what the world calls happiness for your sake.

Now you know, Volney; now you know—everything.
Don't be ice.

(She bows her head. VOLNEY'S face has been inscrutably calm until, after she finishes, he slowly grasps the entire significance of her confession. There is a tense silence.)

VOLNEY

(Slowly)

My career built with the wreckage of another life!

(CLAIRE watches him in suspense as he rises and after a moment's hesitation goes to the telephone.)

CLAIRE

(In a hushed voice)

You'll give this deal up?

VOLNEY

(At the telephone)

Hello! Give me Garden Seventy-one. Yes.

CLAIRE

You'll give this up?

VOLNEY

(Ignoring her)

Hello! Is Mr. Addison there? Yes; Senator Pierce. Thank you. *(Pause.)* Hello, Addison. I've been thinking that little matter over and I've decided I can't accept. *(CLAIRE gives a cry of joy.)* No. Under no considerations. Personal reasons. Wait. *(Deliberately)* This is for your private ear. I'm also sending my resignation by the next mail to the Governor. Yes, resignation. No, I shan't even fill my unexpired term. Personal reasons again. I thought I'd tell you so that you could see "the old man" before it gets out. Irrevocably. Good-by. *(He hangs up the receiver; they stare at each other.)*

CLAIRE

What have you done?

VOLNEY

You heard.

CLAIRE

Given up *everything*?

VOLNEY

I can accept nothing at that price, nor keep what I gained by it. *(She is completely stunned, and he continues with bitterness struggling beneath a cold,*

deliberate manner.) Was that your idea of my character? My love in those days? My strength? Did you think, at the test, I could not, as a man, stand alone?

CLAIRE

I only thought you needed me.

VOLNEY

I did your strength and love, but not your pity.

CLAIRE

You did not know *what* it was I gave you—the effect was the same.

VOLNEY

At the time, perhaps; but your own lie has killed its offspring; now everything's sunk down. The foundations have fallen because they were soaked to rottenness in a woman's tears.

CLAIRE

I gave them willingly for you.

VOLNEY

You expect *me* to receive them proudly like most men? Is that the sort of man you think me? To be proud when a woman sacrificed herself and the man

she loved, fearing I would otherwise fall? That I couldn't rise above talk? Proud? It's an insult to all that's best in me.

CLAIRE

(Halted completely by this unexpected reaction)

Insult?

VOLNEY

Yes. Not to have had the chance to offer you happiness even with your poor weak fool.

CLAIRE

(Defensively)

You would have given everything, I knew; if I had asked. But that wouldn't have altered the other facts. I did what I thought was honorable by you.

VOLNEY

(Scornfully)

Honorable? You thought what you did honorable? You quibble with me because I was about to accept Addison's questionable offer; you are shocked by *that*; yet, with your flexible logic and feminine ideas of moral obligations for seven years you can see nothing despicable in living a lie in my house. Honorable? Ha, ha!

CLAIRE

I suffered for it.

VOLNEY

That was sufficient excuse, I suppose, for the deceit and the hypocrisy. You acted well; played your part splendidly; tricked even my instincts—for I never suspected.

CLAIRE

(With a certain desperate strength and sincerity) .

Give me credit for that. There would have been only a half-gift had I brought you daily tears and a sad smile. There would have been no sacrifice had I given you a broken reed for your constant care and pity. What if I have hid every sigh, every tear, every dull leaden empty hour? You blame me for the lie; credit me with my consideration and sincerity as I saw it.

VOLNEY

Sincerity? And you lived with me all these years *as my wife*, and I never knew. Actress! (*Hitting himself.*) Fool!

CLAIRE

I accepted your name, your roof, your protection. There can be no half ways. I had to give if I took.

VOLNEY

(Revolted)

Wanton!

CLAIRE

No!

VOLNEY

I understand now. Wanton! With your passive pleasures, taking lips that meant his, embraces that touched other memories into fire! And his name! How was it you never gasped his name?

CLAIRE

Don't phrase those hours, do you hear? Don't go so far. I've done with all my woman's strength what I saw was right by you, and you're pulling everything down upon me. I've shown to save your integrity I was willing to risk your love, by telling you what I have. But there are some things your tongue shan't touch. You think I did wrong, but I never stole one hour with him. I tell you I played straight that way.

VOLNEY

How do I know? How can I *ever* know?

CLAIRE

My word.

VOLNEY

Your word? When you lived this lie for seven years—when in not one single act have you changed toward me since I first brought you to my house. You've given *everything* just the same; yet it was a lie, all of it a lie. How can I believe in the truth of one single thing in the present or in the past? How can I, just because you've given your word—your word?

(She sits staring for a long while before her, and the absolute uselessness of future words overwhelms her. He has halted, controlled himself, and stands looking long out of the window. The sunlight lessens.)

CLAIRE

(In a dull, dead voice)

That's true. It's over—finished. We can't live together any longer. What irony! Yet I had the courage to speak at last as I had the courage to live. You won't do the dishonest thing now. But what irony to have killed your love to save you from the other!

VOLNEY

(Turning, questions himself a second, then after a pause, speaks with calmness)

Claire, my love for you has been dead for some time.

CLAIRE

(Silenced at first, not grasping it)

It was dead before *this*? I did not kill it?

VOLNEY

No, it just passed.

CLAIRE

(Smiling cynically)

Even that. Then now it was your vanity and not your heart I hurt.

VOLNEY

I was going to sneak out of it—the injured party—but I guess we'd better face the truth between us for once.

CLAIRE

Yes, it would be best at the end.

VOLNEY

I considered this deal because I hadn't the moral courage to fight as I used to; for back of me here in my home I knew my own deception. That's why I couldn't play straight outside; why I needed the mere excitement to—to get away from things.

CLAIRE

(Bitterly)

So the man, too, could live with his wife when love was dead!

VOLNEY

It's different somehow.

CLAIRE

Everything is different with a man.

VOLNEY

Yes, the tolerance of you women has made it so.
(He starts toward the door.)

CLAIRE

(To herself)

Even that.

VOLNEY

I think that is all.

CLAIRE

What are you going to do?

VOLNEY

I'll arrange things. Then I'll begin new work and mold something apart from this lie. I can, I think.

I'll take up my writing again perhaps. When matters are settled I'll go abroad.

CLAIRE

Abroad? (*She recalls.*) Wait, Volney. (*Directly*)
Is it Judith Shannon?

VOLNEY

(*Turning surprised*)

Judith?

CLAIRE

We do not always know one love is dead until another comes. Do you love her?

VOLNEY

No, certainly not. I've had enough of love.

CLAIRE

(*Slowly*)

Go to her, Volney. When you are free, go to her.

VOLNEY

There never has been one word—

CLAIRE

I know; she told me. She loves you. Go to her.

VOLNEY

(To himself)

Judith!

CLAIRE

That is the one last thing from me you can believe;
my "dishonesty" cannot touch that.

VOLNEY

Judith!

CLAIRE

She also knew about me and the other one.

VOLNEY

(With admiration)

And she never told *me*? How splendid of her!

CLAIRE

(Realizing what the future may offer to him now)

Go to her.

VOLNEY

I suppose we all deserve a little happiness out of
this tangle. I'll arrange things quietly. I'll leave
the house to-night.

CLAIRE

Yes; to-night. (*With a despairing emotional note*)
And what's to become of me?

VOLNEY

(*Kindly*)

Why, you must go to *him*, of course. Go to the
man you love!

(*He goes out quietly, closing the door. She stands dumb at his words. Then she fingers the letter which JUDITH has placed on the table. She stares before her while the day fades.*)

SLOW CURTAIN



MADONNA

PEOPLE

MR. LEE

DONNA, *his daughter*

GILBERT STEELE, *her fiancé*

BARKER, *an old family servant*

SCENE

Living room and library in MR. LEE'S home

MADONNA*.

THE room suggests long occupancy: its book-lined walls and old-fashioned furniture indicate the owner's love of simplicity rather than a small purse. A large engraving of "The Sistine Madonna" in a faded, black wooden frame first catches the eye. Lamps and candle-sticks about are whimsical in shape, and they rest securely in settled places amid the horse-haired sofa and chairs. A fireplace at the left, near a door which opens into DONNA'S room, casts its wavering light upon a snow-rimmed window by it. The general entrance to the room is in a further corner at the right. Another door on this side leads to MR. LEE'S bedroom. The soft lights, with a suggestion of wind and snow without, give a sense of comfort and intimacy to those within.

As the curtain rises, DONNA and MR. LEE, with BARKER waiting on them, are seated at the table just finishing their meal.

DONNA is a sweet girl, about twenty, with golden hair and blue eyes, quaintly pretty in her simple frock. Though there is a suggestion of strength she gives rather the impression of frank, unspoiled innocence.

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MR. LEE *is middle-aged, handsome, and with a delicate tenderness which somehow is lost at times beneath a spasmodically assumed manner of speech. His hair is already prematurely gray, and while he is powerful to the eye, a close observer might detect signs of physical weakness. He has evidently lived an intent life aimed at a great desire and shadowed by deep sorrow. He is in his long smoking-jacket.*

BARKER *is sixty, fairly vigorous, and unoffensively paternal. By preference he is obviously in a butler's suit—rather old-fashioned.*

BARKER *has placed the ices upon the table, but they are left untouched. Something preoccupies each. BARKER removes the ices, showing that he has noticed they have not been eaten. He places a small cup of coffee before DONNA. She waves it aside in silence.*

LEE

I'll take coffee to-night, Barker.

BARKER

(Half reprovingly)

But Dr. Kinard especially said—

LEE

Doctors always forbid you taking the only things you care about. (BARKER *reluctantly pours it half*

out. LEE motions him to fill cup. Takes a sip, puts it down, pushing it aside.) Bah! Something's the matter with everything to-night, Barker.

BARKER

So I see. Neither you or Miss Donna have eaten at all, and I was especially careful on *this* occasion.

DONNA

(*Sweetly*)

Everything was splendid, Barker, only—I—I wasn't hungry.

LEE

Neither was I, Barker.

BARKER

I should have known you wouldn't be—this *last* night together.

(LEE motions him to be silent. DONNA rises and crosses, pulls aside the window curtains. She breathes upon the windowpane, and looks absently out with a curious mingling of gravity and controlled nervousness. LEE watches his daughter a second and sighs.)

LEE

(*Aside*)

Barker, you're a damn fool!

MADONNA

BARKER

So your father said. (*LEE smiles and pats BARKER's shoulder, crossing to large chair. He sits with a slight effort. BARKER looks from one to the other knowingly. There is a broken pause during which BARKER clears the things to a small serving-table in back.*) It was a bad night out, sir. (*No answer.*) Yes, sir. (*He pauses.*) Papers say it'll be clear to-morrow. Hope so. Church bells sound so much sweeter across the snow—after a storm when the air is clear, and the sunlight— (*He sees they are paying no attention. He deliberately rattles a plate. They look.*) Yes, sir! Before we were married, the late Mrs. B. remarked there was sunshine tucked away in most dark clouds. Don't take it so hard. Suppose it would have broken the late Mrs. B.'s heart, *too*,—to have seen you leave us, Miss Donna. Never had any children of our own—to speak of. Our boy didn't amount to much—You were all.

DONNA

(*Recalling fondly*)

Yes. Dear old nursie; how good she was to me. And I was so cross—when I was young. (*LEE grunts.*)

BARKER

Yes. The late Mrs. B. often remarked it. But she loved you—as we did—just for crying day and night.

LEE

Babies always cry at night. (*Thoughtfully*) So do grown people—when they cry. Wonder why? (*He sniffles suspiciously.*) I must have caught a cold. Better bring another log.

BARKER

(*Choking up*)

Yes, sir; we've both got colds. Miss Donna, (*She turns*) I have a little wedding present for you.

DONNA

(*Impulsively*)

Oh, no, Barker, you can't—

BARKER

Can't afford it? I'd like to know what I've been a butler all my life for.

DONNA

I didn't mean that, Barker. Only Gilbert and I have so many presents, I don't know how we're going to live up to them. Besides, I have your love, your good wishes, your—

BARKER

Yes, Miss. But I have as much right as Mr. Lee: he's only your father. When he was away so often

the late Mrs. B. and me combed out your golden curls many a time, and washed your face, and—

DONNA

(Reminiscently)

Yes, yes,—Daddy never saw how dirty I could be *(Laughing)* and how I loved it.

BARKER

It's not much. *(He feels in one pocket, then another, until at last he pulls out a plush box containing an old-fashioned jeweled necklace of odd design.)* Hope you'll wear it to-morrow. It really isn't from me. I've just been keeping it all these years for you. Had it fixed up a bit. It's from the late Mrs. B.

DONNA

(Takes it tenderly)

Oh! how lovely! Look, father! *(Pause.)* Barker, I should like to have you fasten it on. *(He takes it as she bows her head. He fumbles in fastening it.)*

BARKER

My fingers are sort of mixed to-night. *(She stifles a little sob. LEE coughs suspiciously, which BARKER*

notes.) I'd better get that log. We're all catching cold.

(BARKER exits hastily with serving tray. DONNA watches him with teared eyes. The door closes; pause. LEE grunts. DONNA runs to her father, losing control of herself; she sobs, kneeling beside him.)

DONNA

Oh, Daddy, I can't leave you. I can't go away alone with Gilbert to-morrow. I don't want to be married.

LEE

(Holding her close, with infinite understanding and tenderness throughout)

Girlie! girlie!

DONNA

I can't bear leaving home and all my little treasures. I feel just as though I were losing everything I held dearest—everything and you, Daddy.

LEE

I know. I know. I don't want you to go, either. I don't—I don't, my little girl. (*He controls himself.*) Now, I understand how your grandmother must have felt when I took your mother away from

home. I never thought I'd be feeling it myself. It's twice as hard: I have no one to bear it with me.

DONNA

Daddy, say I can't go.

LEE

That's natural. Every girl— But you mustn't feel this way with Gilbert. (*She looks at him.*) You mustn't.

DONNA

Oh! I can't help it. I've tried but I can't. And I love him so. I've always loved him so. But he's going to take me away from you to-morrow, and I'll be *alone* with him, and *then*— (*Trembling*) Oh! I can't—I can't—I can't. (*She sobs heart-broken on his breast. He soothes her hair. He feels helpless. Long pause.*)

LEE

If your mother had only— (*He draws a long breath in recollection.*) You need her now, don't you, girlie?

DONNA

Yes—yes—*she'd* understand.

LEE

Maybe I do a bit, too; though I'm only a man. I haven't been father and mother to you all these years without knowing—

DONNA

(*Looking up into his face*)

Oh! Daddy! you've been everything to me. Everything a girl could want. That's *partly* what makes it so hard to go—because I know how it will hurt you to see me leave the church. (*Eagerly*) Oh, Daddy! why won't you come and live with us? Gilbert wants it. Why do you say you must be alone, now?

LEE

Because it's best, girly—best. You and Gilbert know each other better than most lovers—since you were little tots, too, eh? But there'll be many new things you two will have to work out all by yourselves, and it wouldn't do to have an old, settled, gray-haired man like me snoozing around meddling and mixing things up. No, no. It's best young people should start alone.

DONNA

I suppose you're right; you always are. (*He denies this.*) But you said you were going on a long journey. Couldn't we—

LEE

(Smiling and concealing significance)

The long journey I start on soon, I shall take alone.

DONNA

But I could have waited. So would Gilbert, if I had said so. (*Eagerly*) It's not too late now. If you'll only say so, we'll postpone—

LEE

(Smiling)

No, no—

DONNA

Let me tell him to wait until—

LEE

(Shaking his head and lifting hers with his two hands until she looks into his eyes)

You think it's because you're leaving me and home that you feel this way. It isn't, dearest. You're just deceiving yourself, and I understand the *real* reason, this last night, girlie. I understand *everything*.

DONNA

(Her head sinks into his lap as she realizes he understands her fear)

Yes, that's *why* I am afraid—afraid—afraid.

(She sobs nervously. There is a long pause while the clock slowly strikes nine. LEE notes it, and looking up sees the Madonna, which has slowly grown out of the darkness as the moonbeams have stolen in through the window. Pause.)

LEE

(Rambling casually)

The night is slipping away and the storm has ceased. See! the moon is struggling a wee bit to silver all the land. It takes me back to another night when—*(He sighs.)* Little girl, I've tried to let you know life as it is with no falseness: for the best women are those who know dark secrets yet keep their hearts pure. You've been about enough to know—enough. Gilbert, too, oh! he's a fine lad, isn't he? *(She nods quickly.)* Gilbert hasn't anybody but us. Remember his father? Often wondered why he asked me to take care of his son after he passed by. Now I know: it was for you. I've made Gilbert see some of the world—for I wanted you both to understand that—*(He looks at the jeweled necklace BARKER has given DONNA.)* Good old Barker! Did you ever think,

Donna, that jewels grow in the earth—only some one must clean away the darkness before their beauty shines? Most rare things are like that. (*Making point, and noting its effect upon her.*) Love's a bit like it, too: the kind that crowns a life. My, my! how the hours are flying, and soon you and Gilbert will be facing that great world out there—hand in hand. (*He impulsively hugs her as if in protection.*) You can't know *yet* how foolishly we parents fear to let our children approach the things we've passed. But you all do it, somehow. So there's not much an old fool of a father can say to you now. (*Looking at Madonna*) Yes, there is one thing: one message.

DONNA

(*Nestling*)

Daddy, Gilbert said you'd wish to talk with me. That's why he won't be here to-night. Oh! he is so thoughtful and good. Why is it, several times to-night, when I thought of to-morrow, I almost wished he'd never come? Can't it go on just as it is between him and me? I don't want it to be different. I can't think of—oh, no! I don't mean that—there's something wrong with me—wrong. I try to be calm and happy—but I'm all upset and afraid of, and—oh! (*He puts his hand on her head and pushes back curls.*)

LEE

You just need somebody to catch all the unrest and touch it with a bigger meaning—to see the spirit in

it. (*Looking at Madonna again*) I've been thinking lately perhaps I'll have to set you straight about it all.

(*BARKER has entered with a log. He fixes the fire in silence, and it burns up. The wind outside is heard occasionally.*)

BARKER

Shall I light the others?

DONNA

Let me. Just the candles and the firelight. We'll sit beside it, Daddy, you and I, and talk, and the wind outside will tell us we are all alone.

BARKER

(*Crossing to door*)

I'll get the candles.

LEE

Let Donna. I like to watch her light them.

(*DONNA exits.*)

BARKER

(*After a pause, looking about the room, including picture*)

Pardon me, sir, but do you notice anything strange about the room to-night? (*LEE questions.*) Somehow, it seems so sacred-like.

LEE

You noticed it, too? I thought it was just here. (*Touching himself*) It seems like some memory whispering silently. (*He rises abruptly.*) You sent my note to Mr. Gilbert?

BARKER

He's hardly had time to get here yet.

LEE

Nonsense: I said *she* wanted to see him.

BARKER

I'll show him right in.

LEE

And go to bed yourself and sleep if you can.

(*He places hand on heart quickly as though in great pain. Staggers. BARKER goes to him.*)

BARKER

Sit down, sir.

LEE

(*Recovering*)

It's the old trouble, you know. Can't keep up much longer. Doctor said so. Rupture of aneurism

threatened: that means a broken heart. I've had a hard time keeping the pieces together since— Donna mustn't know—about my long journey alone—that she and Gilbert will only have each other soon—very soon.

BARKER

Don't talk that way, sir.

LEE

I won't. But you're provided for, old fellow. My! My! (*Grimly*) I wonder if you'll look after me in the next world.

BARKER

(*Tenderly*)

I hope I've been *good* enough, sir.

(*LEE smiles and pats him tenderly as DONNA re-enters with two long brass candlesticks. The door bell without is rung violently.*)

DONNA

Remember, Barker, Daddy and I are not home to a single soul.

BARKER

(*Smiling quaintly*)

I understand, Miss—not to a *single* soul. Good-night.

(He exits. The wind outside blows, and the fire burns brighter. LEE crosses to fireplace, watching her as she places the candlesticks down. The door is flung violently open, and GILBERT STEELE enters hastily, out of breath, excited, throwing his snow-touched coat and hat down on chair. He is a clean-cut, very attractive fellow, about twenty-five, with a touch of boyish vivacity beneath the suggestion of reliable manliness. The two rush into each other's arms.)

DONNA

Gilbert!

GILBERT

There is nothing the matter? Nothing? *(He kisses her eagerly on the lips.)*

DONNA

Why, no, dearest, no.

GILBERT

It would break my heart if— *(He kisses her again.)*

DONNA

I'm so glad you've come; but—why did you?

LEE

I guess I'm responsible.

GILBERT

(Seeing him)

Oh! I beg your pardon. *(They greet each other affectionately.)*

LEE

One doesn't always see things in the fire with angels in one's arms.

DONNA

Daddy!

GILBERT

I was alone, thinking how—how unworthy I was to have such happiness—what a weak fellow I'd been at times—and—then your note came. *(He gives it to DONNA.)*

DONNA

(Reading)

"Come at once. Donna wants to see you." But I don't want to see you, Gilbert.

GILBERT

Don't you?

MADONNA

DONNA

(Confused)

Oh, I mean—

GILBERT

(Solicitously)

Why did you send for me, Mr. Lee? I thought you'd both wish to be alone. Is there something you want me to hear with her? Nothing's going to interfere?

LEE

*(Crosses slowly, puts hand on GILBERT'S shoulders.
Starts to speak seriously, hesitates, and
notes DONNA'S intent look)*

Where are you going on your wedding trip?

GILBERT

(Laughing)

Now, that wasn't why—

DONNA

Besides, that's our little secret.

LEE

Niagara Falls? *(They vehemently deny it.)* Well, wherever you go, don't be too polite to her, and don't act as though you'd never been married before.

GILBERT

I am afraid everybody'll know I'm an amateur.

LEE

(Musing)

I'll never forget how I acted—and I was a good deal older than you. My! how proud and foolish you feel.

GILBERT

(Wisely)

Yes, sir.

LEE

(Smiling)

Get Gilbert some cigarettes, Donna. *(She does so: GILBERT takes one, and only smokes it a moment nervously.)* Let me fix you something.

GILBERT

No, I'm not thirsty.

LEE

(Smiling)

Not thirsty? That isn't a legitimate excuse!

(There is a long pause. They look at one another in embarrassed silence. LEE has been smoking also.)

DONNA

Well, can't we sit down?

GILBERT

Sure.

LEE

Yes. (*They all keep standing, however. He finally knocks ashes from his pipe, and sits by fireside.*)
Come here, the two of you.

DONNA

Just like when you used to tell us fairy stories.
Goodness! how long ago!

LEE

Perhaps that's what I'm going to tell you now—a real fairy story—one I've lived through and have not finished quite yet. Now a lot of people would laugh at me for talking this way to you two, but they'll never get the chance, will they? Life has made me believe in "big" things. Perhaps I am wise and preachy to-night, but I always feel that way, Donna, when—when I think of your mother.

DONNA

(*Reverently*)

My mother!

GILBERT

(Same)

It's about her you wish to speak to Donna? (LEE bows. GILBERT starts to rise.) Then hadn't I better go? I know you've always been silent about her.

LEE

No, boy. Stay! It's a father's last words to you both, and a whisper from a memory. (GILBERT sits beside the two. The clock strikes the half hour. The fire lights the group. The scene is full of poetry and suggestion.) I hadn't amounted to much before I met her: but somehow she believed in me and I felt she did. She made me want to *do* things, for her sake as well as my own. And she wouldn't let me wait till I had: she wanted to struggle along *with* me. We married, and she gave up many a better man. You must struggle together for a while. It will bring out the best in you—and perhaps I haven't altogether forgotten you— But it's of your mother I was speaking. I brought her from the church *here* in this room. It has always been home to me all these years. (*Looking about*) It hasn't changed much; only when you grew up, Donna, I moved the bed into my little room off, and put some books in. (*Indicating books under picture of Madonna*) But the pictures and things are about as they were when we first came here together, alone. (*Reminiscently*) She was very beautiful, children, very beautiful, with her soft eyes and

golden hair. How those months passed! We often sat by that window during the long summer evenings: I, talking over my work with her, and she listening gravely and sewing the baby clothes you were soon to wear. It was here, you know, you were born. I was with Barker in his room. (*Smiling.*) He seemed to think I only needed brandy—Ha! how long it was till the late Mrs. B. came to tell me a little girl had come. They wouldn't let me speak to your mother that day; but, at night, I tip-toed into the room and closed that door. We were alone. On the tiny crib a hand rested as though it warned all trespassers away. I could not move for a long while. I felt in some shrine, where no *man* should have entered. Her breath was calm and steady, like music in the silence. She moved and brushed a curl from her brow, and the moonbeams fell upon her golden hair which haloed everything! I went nearer, like a thief, to steal a look at you. She did not hear *me*: she heard the breathing of our child, and only in her dreams. I pulled the coverlet down and looked at you. You weren't so pretty then. (*He smiles.*) And yet I don't think you ever seemed more wonderful to me. Your mother never moved, even when I knelt beside her and kissed her hand and tried to think the things I felt. (*A long pause, as though he were lost in recollection. DONNA looks up. Puts her hand on his, recalling him.*) I don't know how long I was there, only from your mother's face the moonlight rose and threw its rays like fingers pointing to the picture above her bed. (*Indicating Madonna*) It was that

same picture. (*Pause.*) Children, there are some things we lock in our hearts and throw away the key or save the key to use it *once*. You two alone must know I felt somehow that night as though I knew all the secrets of the world—for I understood *then* what love was—what marriage really meant to those who really loved. (*Tenderly*) That was the most sacred moment in my life. (*There is a sense of awe present.*) As I sat there, Gilbert, I resolved to be worthy. We men never feel worthy, do we? (GILBERT *lowers his head.*) Well, I've tried to be. (DONNA *squeezes his hand.*) And to that little bit of breathing flesh, now grown so like her mother, I promised all the best that could be—so that she would be a worthy wife and *mother* to the man she loved—as her mother was to me. Gilbert, she's the dearest thing I'm leaving behind (*Correcting himself*) I have. Take good care of her. I know you will 'cause I know you are worthy, too. (*Long pause.*) Your mother never left her bed. I told her of my midnight visit before she—and she only pressed my hand—oh! so faintly—and never said a word. But I knew she understood and was proud that her little girl would grow up. I couldn't help calling you Donna—"Madonna"—because somehow that night has always been a yesterday. (*He clears his throat.*) Children, never be ashamed of the biggest and best thoughts you feel. I wonder if you two understand the real big thing an old, foolish, sentimental father is trying to tell you this wedding eve? (*Calmly and reverently* DONNA *rests her head upon her father's bosom. He puts his*

arm about her and looks at GILBERT, who stretches out his hand in understanding and in reverence. GILBERT's face is set and determined. LEE stands looking at them; then places their hands in each others. They watch him go back, take a candle, and hold it high above him before the Madonna and her Child. They look reverently at it, too. Pause. He puts the candle on the table near the picture and comes down.) Donna, go to your room. You'll want to be all by yourself, now. Say good-night to her, Gilbert, and good-by 'til I bring her to you in the church to-morrow.

(GILBERT reaches over to her, she lifts her lips to his but he gently lowers her head and kisses, with infinite reverence, her hair. She lifts her head, a wonderful smile of spiritual love lighting her eyes. They look at each other firmly. He turns to LEE, offers his hand. LEE hugs him. GILBERT tries to speak but cannot. He turns, halts before the Madonna a second, and then exits. DONNA crosses to LEE. He takes her in his arms. She is very calm now. She leaves him, and with a look of emulation, proudly flung to the picture, she crosses and slowly goes off.

LEE is alone. He staggers a moment as though seized with heart trouble. He recovers with effort. He puts out the lights, closes the door, fastens the windows, pulls down the shades, cutting out the moonlight and leaving only the

firelight and a single candle to light the room. He takes this one candle and holds it high above the Madonna. He half murmurs before it. The clock strikes ten slowly, and he stands there motionless, like some shadow, lost in memory.)

SLOW CURTAIN



THE MAN MASTERFUL

THE PEOPLE

OLIVER WILLIAMS (*who does not appear*)

MRS. OLIVER WILLIAMS, *his wife*

EDITH SHERWOOD

SCENE

A room in EDITH SHERWOOD'S flat

THE MAN MASTERFUL*

THE entrance from the hallway is at the back in right; the varnished door holds a heavy chain which, at rise of curtain, is fastened across. Upon the back wall there are many small pictures and photographs; beneath them a long box-couch with a green covering. At the left, a double curtain drawn hides further rooms beyond. At the right, a bureau and some bookcases fill the space between the door and the window which opens out upon the fire-escape. There is a writing table in the center with chairs about. The room suggests the abode of a woman supporting herself, with its certain air of unspecified use coupled with touches purely feminine. There are some indications, however, that its owner is not without connections and sympathies more aristocratic than her present surroundings would imply.

The stage is empty for a while, then a bell is heard off. The noise of some one behind the curtains is suggested evidently rising to open the downstairs front door. After a short delay a knock is heard upon the apartment door itself. EDITH SHERWOOD enters from

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the other room, and crosses, after portraying a sense of the importance of what is to happen.

She is dressed in a neat, simple, closely fitting gingham gown which may have been made by herself. She is tall, well-lined, robust, and vibrant. There is authority and self-reliance in her personality, and the beautiful Greek regularity of her face does not entirely conceal its warmth and health. At present, though, there are traces of long vigil and mental suffering. She removes the chain, opens the door to discover MRS. OLIVER WILLIAMS standing outside, her hands half folded before her as though having waited in patience.

MRS. WILLIAMS is middle-aged, her hair turning gray, her face pinched and bloodless. There is little indication of any vitality save in her restless eyes: her manner is calm though not without conveying some studied intention throughout. She uses few gestures, and speaks almost without emotion in an even monotone, yet with a subtle strength in spite of her obvious physical weakness. She is very carelessly gownned, and her appearance at first would be always inconspicuous. She holds a letter in her hand to which she refers and then replaces in her handbag. MISS SHERWOOD is slightly embarrassed.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Is this Miss Sherwood? Edith Sherwood?

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I am Oliver Williams' wife.

MISS SHERWOOD

Oh, to be sure. I—I didn't mean you should take all this trouble, Mrs. Williams.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I thought we could talk better. My husband might have come in at home. You were not expecting him *here*, though, were you?

MISS SHERWOOD

No, not now.

MRS. WILLIAMS

That would have been a pity, wouldn't it?

MISS SHERWOOD

Do come in.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Thanks.

(MRS. WILLIAMS comes in almost diffidently as MISS SHERWOOD, deeply moved and trying to gather herself together, slowly crosses the door, and mechanically fastens the chain.)

MISS SHERWOOD

Won't you sit down?

MRS. WILLIAMS

Thanks. (*She goes to a chair.*) You wrote you wanted to talk to me.

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes, yes, but—

MRS. WILLIAMS

I suppose it's about my husband.

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes, Mrs. Williams, it is—but—

MRS. WILLIAMS

(*Calmly*)

Well?

MISS SHERWOOD

(*With a little nervous laugh*)

I knew exactly what I expected to say—but—but you're not like I thought.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Then you've never seen me with him? (MISS SHERWOOD *shakes her head slowly.*) We go out very little together: he has other places where he—

MISS SHERWOOD

(*Interrupting*)

Yes; that's what I want to talk of, Mrs. Williams—about myself and him.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I thought so; it was kind of you to write—first.

MISS SHERWOOD

(*Temporizing*)

Perhaps there was a little curiosity, too.

MRS. WILLIAMS

To see what Oliver Williams' wife was like? Well, it did surprise you, didn't it? And please you, too! (MISS SHERWOOD *conventionally protests.*) Oh, people never look at me when I pass. I know. But I wasn't always parched and sapless: once I was like you—and not so many years ago—like you, red and strong—but never so handsome—no; yet *inside* I was alive and beautiful. That's just as good, isn't it?

MISS SHERWOOD

To be sure—to be sure.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(*Eying her*)

Well, now that you see I'm not much of a *rival* (MISS SHERWOOD *turns abruptly toward her: they face each other*)—suppose you tell me what you were going to.

MISS SHERWOOD

It's harder than I thought. But I felt I simply had to do it. *He's* not aware I wrote you, is he?

MRS. WILLIAMS

I tell him nothing.

MISS SHERWOOD

I'm glad, though it seems somehow disloyal to him. (*Impulsively*) He told me you didn't love him. (MRS. WILLIAMS *starts slightly*.) Oh, you don't, do you? Oh, give me the truth and I'll explain.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(*After a moment's deliberation as though calmly trying to measure the other woman*)

Why should that concern you and him?

MISS SHERWOOD

Oh, it does, it does. I must know that before I speak further. I must. I must. Do you love him?

MRS. WILLIAMS

No. (MISS SHERWOOD *breathes easier, though the other scrutinizes her closely.*) But I watch him all the time in silence. I wonder if he feels my eyes on him. That's how I knew there was somebody else, knew it was *you*.

MISS SHERWOOD

(*Slightly surprised*)

He has spoken of me?

MRS. WILLIAMS

Once or twice, before he realized you were going to mean something to him. He's been silent lately. People are so careless while they are *still* unconscious and (*pointedly*) and innocent.

MISS SHERWOOD

(*Indignantly*)

Mrs. Williams, I'm a good woman. I'm straight.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(*Slowly, as though satisfied*)

Yes, I believe you. I wanted to be sure. Now there can be truth between us.

MISS SHERWOOD

I intend to keep everything honest—honest or nothing.

MRS. WILLIAMS

How can I help you? I'm only his wife—Oliver Williams' wife. (*Faintly smiling*) I wonder if you know what that means?

MISS SHERWOOD

I had my idea of what she would—should be like, but I can't make you out; you're different.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I'm not the woman he married: I'm made over. He has changed, too, in fifteen years. Things are different in the spring. You feel you're more his sort, eh?

MISS SHERWOOD

He thinks so.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Do *you*?

MISS SHERWOOD

He loves me.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(*Half to herself*)

So! it has come to him again! (*After a pause*)
Well, now that I've seen you, there's nothing surprising about that. And you?

MISS SHERWOOD

I care, too. I don't bow my head when I say it. I love him.

MRS. WILLIAMS

It's in your eyes.

MISS SHERWOOD

But I made up my mind he shouldn't look deep into them and see for himself till I was first sure you didn't love him.

MRS. WILLIAMS

And now that you *are* sure?

MISS SHERWOOD

I can ask you, as I intended, without compunction, let us have our happiness.

MRS. WILLIAMS

To marry you?

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes, of course that.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Give him up? *Entirely?*

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(As though recalling)

How strange!

MISS SHERWOOD

—in my seeking you, his wife, in this unusual, open way?

MRS. WILLIAMS

No; I was thinking of something else.

MISS SHERWOOD

I see no fault in loving, understand me: so I give no excuse, but I must make an explanation. I sat here many nights puzzling over what was best, for I knew by doing the bravest thing I could keep my love most clean. When I first met him I didn't know he was married: no one of his many friends ever spoke of you. Oh, I didn't mean— Forgive me. (MRS.

WILLIAMS *motions her to continue.*) But I wasn't on my guard, and then, as you said, it was all so unconscious and beautiful. Yet I soon sensed his interest: we women are never surprised when men love us, are we? We sort of take it for granted. (*Enthusiastically*) But *he* was so unusual—such a wonderful, masterful man!

MRS. WILLIAMS

Yes; masterful.

MISS SHERWOOD

And I was flattered. I confess it; why shouldn't I be—to have Oliver Williams pause and look! Then one evening he told me about you. It must have been because he knew I was straight, and his feeling was the right kind. He saw it pained me, shocked me. From that moment I was a divided self. I'm anxious you should see how everything was. I tried to draw away gradually, but that only led him on. Then, when I was about to go for good, to give up my little work here—for I felt I couldn't escape him when he talked (MRS. WILLIAMS *smiles knowingly*)—he told me you didn't love him. Then, Mrs. Williams, I stayed deliberately, because I owed something to the thing I knew by now I felt. I wanted to share in his mastery, his career—before all. So I saw there could be no compromise in secrecy. (*She is silent a few moments.*)

MRS. WILLIAMS

Love dies of its own breath with the windows closed.

MISS SHERWOOD

That's why I struggled to find what was right; but love was no longer a heart-crying emotion; it was a problem writhing in my brain as well—and that isn't good for love. I couldn't have stood my burning mind much more, if he hadn't finally said that—that, with you, there was another, too.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(Visibly moved for the first time)

Was?

MISS SHERWOOD

And had been.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(Poignantly)

He told you that?

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes.

MRS. WILLIAMS

To bribe you he told you that!! Oh! *(She bows her head in a long silence.)*

MISS SHERWOOD

(Somewhat at a loss)

I didn't mean to walk in on anything sacred or intimate. It's yours and only mine so far as it might help us to some solution. But we must be naked, Mrs. Williams, in moments like these. Perhaps he thought it would be so much easier for us all if I knew. It did seem so to me—if only you and I quite understood things right—once and for all.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(Slowly)

It does seem simple-like on the surface, doesn't it? *(She lifts her head and speaks very deliberately.)* But you can't have him, do you hear me? You can't have him!

MISS SHERWOOD

(Impetuously)

What's to prevent him if I say—

MRS. WILLIAMS

Not these frail arms of mine. No. They couldn't keep Oliver Williams from having his own way. He'd brush them aside and crush them like those who oppose him out in the world. But *you* alone can stop him—and you will.

MISS SHERWOOD

Step in the way of my own happiness?

MRS. WILLIAMS

Are you so sure it would be happiness?

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes; it's everything. I can't do without him; I've tried to think of it: it's terrible. I know now why one commits crimes. I feel sometimes as though I could—oh, no, no. I love him. (*Bitterly*) If you don't love each other, why shouldn't he be mine? Did I come and steal him? Wasn't love dead between you before I came? Why shouldn't I have him? Is marriage for you a knot tied in Heaven to whip and bruise those others who come within its swing? Why should those dry ideals of wifehood stand in the way of throbbing lives? Mine and perhaps the man you love. Why?

MRS. WILLIAMS

(*Calmly*)

Do you believe it's *that* which stands in your way? Listen: if you and he had gone away together I think I would respect you almost as much as I do your coming to me now. You should have done what I hadn't the strength to do and I would have understood. But you didn't; so I treat you differently. Don't think it's my pride, my duty, or my religion

that will keep me firm against you. No. No. I wish I had those excuses.

MISS SHERWOOD

Then it's small-soulness.

MRS. WILLIAMS

No, it's my absolute helplessness now. You can't have him, because I need him.

MISS SHERWOOD

I need him, too. He needs me.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Oliver Williams needs you!

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes, I can help him to achieve.

MRS. WILLIAMS

You! (*She smiles; then shakes her head.*) You can't have him. He's my habit of life; I'm too settled to change.

MISS SHERWOOD

(*Leaning closer to her*)

Even to go to the other one?

MRS. WILLIAMS

(With a touch of indignation)

'After a dozen years, go to *him*? What! Take to him, because of an opportunity, this sapless body! Give *this* that belongs to the husband, to the man who loved me when I was like you! No! No! The memory of the thing he loved is better for him to keep now; that still warms the coldness. This I am to-day would freeze and starve.

MISS SHERWOOD

(Desperately)

Yet you have starved him all these years.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(Quickly)

Not by taking from him something he had.

MISS SHERWOOD

Yet perhaps he still hungers.

MRS. WILLIAMS

You can't tempt me with that. The taste would destroy the need; now, for him it's an inspiration, a dream unpossessed. He is becoming something and I know it's through me. *(Recalling)* He never married. He sends me presents, without a word, on the

anniversaries—as if I needed reminders. But he gets no answer, expects nothing, for he never thought I cared.

MISS SHERWOOD

Never?

MRS. WILLIAMS

If he had once seen my love I should have gone to him then. I wouldn't have let him suffer the *other* way—or I would have—(*she recoils slightly*)—I nearly did it as it was! Instead, instead I told my husband first, as you have told me first; opened my poor heart to him in trust. That's really why you can't have my husband, for he didn't let me go: he kept me—kept me.

MISS SHERWOOD

He loved you at the time.

MRS. WILLIAMS

He wouldn't let another have the thing he owned! He called it love, but words are only masks and we all use many words. Yet stunned, bewildered, perhaps flattered, too, that I should be *worth* fighting to keep, I weakly submitted to his first wishes.

MISS SHERWOOD

(*Struggling against the irony she begins to see*)

It's small, petty revenge you're taking; you're making him and me pay for your own weakness.

MRS. WILLIAMS

No; life's simply paying you both back for the weakness *he* made! It was strength that made me go to him first—strength. I've never known it since. There was something being born at that moment, a soul, a character, and he smothered it. It wanted to live. But it was such a little thing it couldn't fight very much; it hadn't learned how. It died easily; he closed the windows about it.

MISS SHERWOOD

(Impressed in spite of herself by the other's manner, she shudders and is silent for a while.)

Mrs. Williams, you are speaking of the man I love. You are saying dreadful words. To plant in me doubts alone would be cruel. Don't you realize, I'm trying to be a decent woman, fair to you? But you must be fair to me: he is mine, remember, while I care—mine *here* in me. You must let me understand what you mean.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Yes. We must be naked, you said: it chills, but I think you're worth telling it to; for it will save you from him.

MISS SHERWOOD

(Loyally)

You can't strip him. He's too wonderful to me. You mustn't try.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Too bad he should lose a love like yours.

MISS SHERWOOD

(*Firmly*)

I am waiting to be made sure that he must.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(*Her voice gradually warms in color as she speaks*)

Then look at me when I have finished telling you. Blame me, if you will; I do myself, though it doesn't seem to alter consequences. But remember, it was that he *could* do it, that he *could* rip me from the roots, take me away to isolation; a lonely island in the Lakes where things were barren and the sands dry and burning and I had only him before me day and night. Then to strip me of all the garments I had worn, to put on the harness of daily service to his man's needs, to do things I never had done before, to fetch and carry at his will. And you ask, why, *why* did I? Because he talked to me the way you know he has; he made me believe he was doing it for my good. And I kept on because I felt then I had offended him somehow—him who couldn't keep my love—and that he might also see I was wiping out the fault. But he had other reasons than to clear myself in his sight; he was doing something else deliberately all the time, methodically, carefully, studiously. But I didn't see

it at first—pain dulled me too much to look outside. I only knew in the loneliness the days were growing longer after a while, and when I faltered, he came to me kindly and helped me with his own hands to fetch and carry. And all the days grew longer and he helped me more and more. And then I began to ask his help and he smiled. I knew why later. He gave it gladly. And then one day I was ill and *I let him wait on me without the asking*. From that moment I was lost—lost. Oh, I see every step of it now. If only the hand of him I loved could have touched me just once; but I was too far away to feel it and I was too numb and I was living in a fog. Then things lifted slowly as fogs do, and I saw what my husband was accomplishing. I began to watch to be sure I was right. That's where I began to watch. I was right. I saw through his heart. I put tests: he always met them, did as I expected. It fascinated me to watch, as though I saw the gallows being built—interested me, eased the pain somehow, too. He was devoting himself to accomplish one end—with all his absorbing power, one end: to make himself *necessary* to me; to make me see I was his dependent thing.

MISS SHERWOOD

(*Enthusiastically*)

That was strength! Wonderful strength! If he had done that to me I should have loved him for it!

MRS. WILLIAMS

It wouldn't have hurt *you*. You're that sort of woman; made to live with steel. That's maybe why he loves you. He feels that perhaps. You would have been his slave!

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes, to my glory!

MRS. WILLIAMS

And you couldn't have left him?

MISS SHERWOOD

No!

MRS. WILLIAMS

Neither *could* I—neither *can* I; but for a different reason. Do you think him so heartless to have kept it always like that? Oh, no; he knew his methods well. He came to me one day and told me I could go if I desired—leave him. He wanted me to credit his generosity, to bind me closer, to make me believe I was staying of my own free will—that strongest bond of all. He didn't know I saw through him and that I didn't dare wound his pride further by showing him I knew. But each time I tried to break I felt bound more and more by the sense of my own helplessness, my own limitations which he had planned to make me realize. Before, sheer love without thought

and self doubt could have swept me on safely through anything: but now—now I doubted myself. And in that doubt I found my own unworthiness. I couldn't take *that* to the other. I couldn't, but my husband did not know I couldn't. That's *why* I stayed. That's why I saw only too willingly the many obstacles for leaving him he used to throw in my way—finding eager excuses within myself for the crime against my love—; that's why more and more I slipped back, back upon that helplessness which at least obtained service from him. And as I took it more and more greedily, with the years I lost more and more the red blood of life, and, for sheer self-protection, I began, in turn, to bind him to me more and more by that helplessness until there was nothing of my own strength left—only the rut habit dragged me through, the rut I have never been able to escape from all these years. And that's why you can't have him. Look at me! Look what I am! I've no strength to be alone. He's my habit of life. I'd be lost without him. I can't do things by myself. I'm helpless—dependent. I'm his. He tied me to him, bound me: I'm round his neck: he must drag me on. You can't, with your love, untie that knot; I can't. He tied it. He has got to keep the thing he made. I'm his. He's mine—mine—to the end!

(There is a long pause. MISS SHERWOOD has bowed her head, completely overcome. MRS. WILLIAMS, however, soon gains control of herself, covertly looks toward the other, and waits. They resume very quietly.)

MISS SHERWOOD

If it only had been love I could forgive him.

MRS. WILLIAMS

So could I—a little—but not myself.

MISS SHERWOOD

It wasn't honest of him to tell me of the other one, after that.

MRS. WILLIAMS

He drove the other deeper into my life. I did not know he realized it. That's something to have learned.

MISS SHERWOOD

(Bitterly)

To bribe me! It wasn't honest!

MRS. WILLIAMS

(Following up her advantage)

He's not honest, I tell you. He has a way of stalking up and down, making you believe him in spite of yourself because his pride is in it. It's his power. I gave him that power.

MISS SHERWOOD

You!

MRS. WILLIAMS

Yes. I watched it come into birth there on the lonely island. Don't you see his own strength was on trial? He couldn't afford to fail. So, through conquering me, a frail woman, he found the way out there to conquer in the world.

MISS SHERWOOD

I wonder if he knows that?

MRS. WILLIAMS

(Shaking her head and smiling faintly)

That's my secret and why I sometimes smile. So you can teach him nothing.

MISS SHERWOOD

And I thought I could give him something greater than you!

MRS. WILLIAMS

You'd be like the *others*. (MISS SHERWOOD *looks up slowly*.) I can tell you. There have been others. He will remember you, for he forgets when once he has.

MISS SHERWOOD

That strips everything.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(Calmly)

I must fight for what is mine. I watch him: I always know when they come. I take them away from him one by one: there's a way. You are better than the others: I've given you the truth. (*There is silence, then she rises.*) And if he should come here—and talk?

MISS SHERWOOD

(Looking up)

I'd see you clinging to his arm.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(Relieved)

Then go away. Don't wait or hope for me. Dead trees stand long. What good you've brought each other through the feeling will remain. (*Smiling grimly*) I don't mind that since I have him.

MISS SHERWOOD

Yes, I'll go. Everything is over.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Good-by.

MISS SHERWOOD

If only he valued you.

THE MAN MASTERFUL

MRS. WILLIAMS

(Smiling enigmatically)

I don't want him to: that would make it harder for me and him.

MISS SHERWOOD

I see. *(She buries her head in her arms.)*

MRS. WILLIAMS

(After some hesitation)

I feel for you with what there is left in me. Memory just now made me live and suffer for a moment. It will be with you, too, a long while. Then some morning you will awake without his name on your lips; that will cut deepest when you think of it, for it seems disloyal to forget. But that also will pass and you'll find new reasons besides the ones I've shown for doing what you must do. I know: we all fool ourselves so to make things easier. Good-by.

MISS SHERWOOD

Good-by.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(At the door)

If he had only let me go—*made* me go!

MISS SHERWOOD

He would have been free and I might have—

MRS. WILLIAMS

Strange how life works out.

MISS SHERWOOD

(*Yearning*)

I might have—

MRS. WILLIAMS

Who knows? He might have been different if he hadn't conquered me.

MISS SHERWOOD

I must suffer for it.

MRS. WILLIAMS

The best thing he has loved, too. Strange!

(*As MRS. WILLIAMS is about to go out of the door which she has opened a sudden idea strikes MISS SHERWOOD. She rises and faces MRS. WILLIAMS.*)

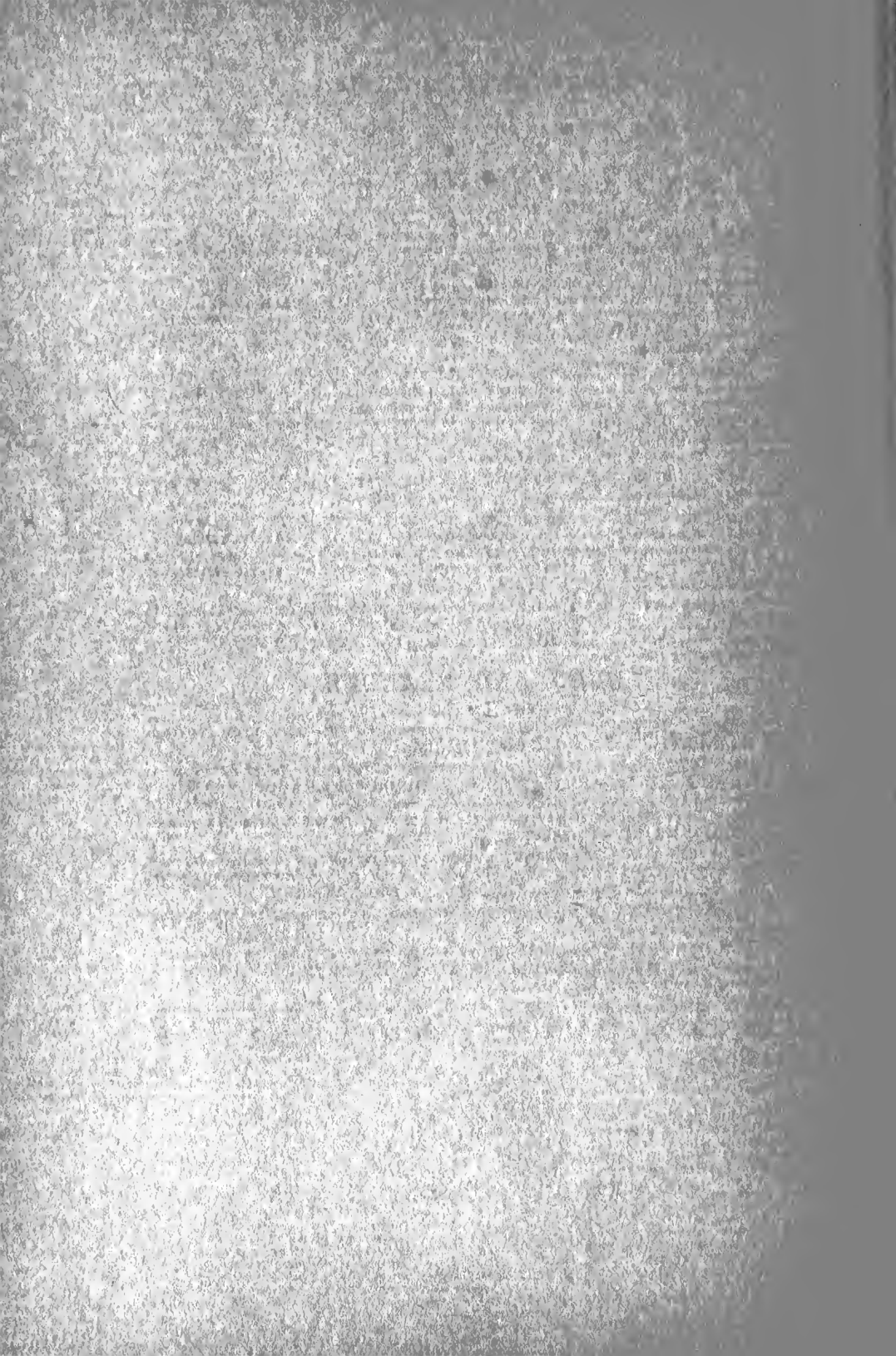
MISS SHERWOOD

Mrs. Williams, did you tell the truth? Did you tell *everything*? Do you still love—? (*She halts helplessly at the other's silence.*) What difference

would it make, anyway? It's over. Oh!!— (*She comes slowly down and sits upon the chair again, her hands clasped before her.*) Yet it was masterful!! (*She seems to glow at the thought, but MRS. WILLIAMS only smiles enigmatically and slowly goes out, quietly closing the door after her.*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY





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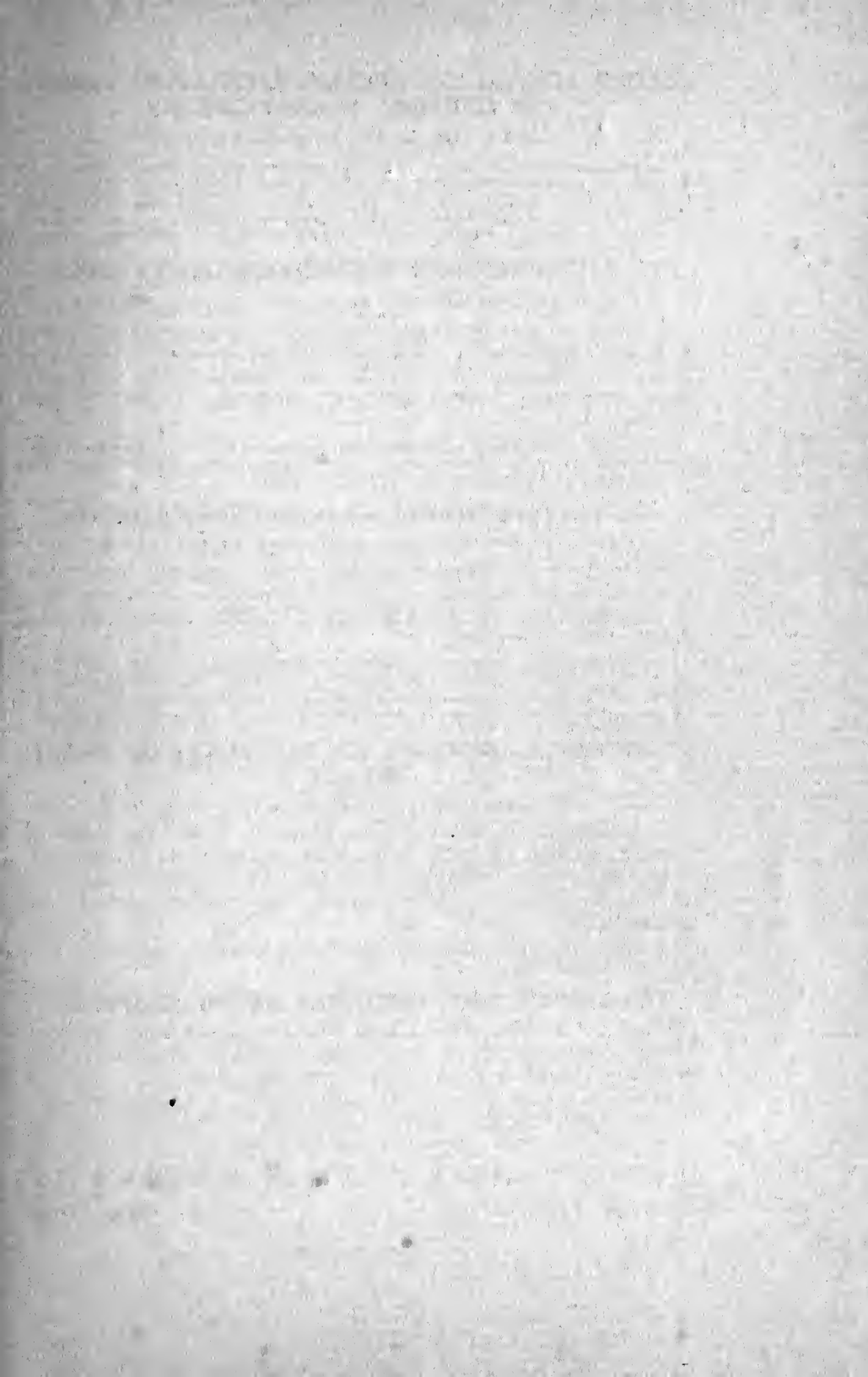
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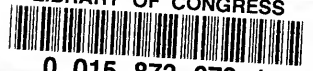


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